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Gift of the People of the United States
Through the Victory Book Campaign
(A. L. A. — A. R. C. — U. S. O.)
To the Armed Forces and Merchant Marine



HIS MAJESTY'S SLOOP

Diamond Rock



(page 21)

"THIS IS WHAT I CALL JOLLY !"

His Majesty's Sloop Diamond Rock

H. S. HUNTINGTON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge

1904



His Majesty's Sloop Diamond Rock

BY

H. S. HUNTINGTON, *author of "The Sloop of War"*
"The Sloop of War"
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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The Riverside Press, Cambridge

1904

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Published October 1904

TO MRS. MANSEL F. CARR,
SANTA MARTA, COLOMBIA.

Dear Mrs. Carr:

This book is inscribed to you in grateful remembrance of your kindness to me and mine. And because it is written by an American, and is a record of English boyhood and heroism, it is rightly dedicated to an English wife and mother.

H. S. HUNTINGTON.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. MASTER TOM	1
II. MR. MIDSHIPMAN REEVES	11
III. COMMODORE HOOD	23
IV. DIAMOND ROCK	33
V. HIS MAJESTY'S SLOOP	51
VI. THE FLAGS	60
VII. THE FORTUNES OF WAR	64
VIII. THE CUTTING OUT	73
IX. A CRUISE	81
X. THE SANDERS	93
XI. CLEAR DECK FOR ACTION!	109
XII. A FUGITIVE MIDSHIPMAN	124
XIII. THE MOUNTAIN FOREST	133
XIV. MADEMOISELLE	142
XV. MONSIEUR DE LA BOURDONIER	152
XVI. ENOUGH TO EAT	163
XVII. ALCIDE	174
XXVIII. THE METEOR FLAG	185
XIX. CAN IT BE DONE?	195
XX. A COUNCIL OF WAR	203
XXI. A GREAT PLAN	212
XXII. DIANA HUNTING	225
XXIII. NAPOLEON	234
XXIV. GENERAL ORDERS	243
XXV. THE CARRIAGE	256
XXVI. TALKING ACROSS THE WATER	269
XXVII. THE LETTER	284
XXVIII. ON THE WAY	296

XXIX. HOSPITALITY	306
XXX. EXIT MADEMOISELLE	314
XXXI. GALEON BAY	321
XXXII. A HOSTILE FLEET	331
XXXIII. THE DEFENSE OF THE DIAMOND ROCK .	342
XXXIV. THE CABLE	350
XXXV. THE PLANS OF THE ENEMY	373
XXXVI. NELSON	390
XXXVII. NAPOLEON'S PLAN	404
XXXVIII. DISPATCHES FROM NELSON	411
XXXIX. THE END OF THE STORY	425

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
"THIS IS WHAT I CALL JOLLY!" (page 21)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
"SHALL WE BOARD HER?"	66
"I SHALL BE A DUCHESS"	150
TOM MADE ANSWER: "T-O-M R-E-E-V-E-S"	276

COMMODORE HOOD and Captains Maurice and Bettesworth are historical characters, and you may read about them elsewhere. The Diamond Rock was won and lost just as I have related, and for nearly two years it was on the Admiralty books as a sloop of war. It is quite true that the *Curieux* was cut out from the harbor of Fort-de-France, and that she subsequently carried important dispatches to England. You may look vainly in the books for Tom and Ned and Ralph, but they are true, and will be true as long as English and American hearts are brave and loyal. To the best of my knowledge, Mademoiselle and her father are true also.

HIS MAJESTY'S SLOOP DIAMOND ROCK

I

MASTER TOM

IN 1803 Master Tommy Reeves, aged thirteen, attended an excellent private school near Plymouth, England. He was a sturdy little fellow, active and enterprising, as a boy should be, a leader in all games and sports, and fairly good at his books; in short, an average young Briton, with the making of a man in him. It was known that he could thrash any lad of his age in the school; he had thrashed several of them, and, I regret to say, was much respected in consequence. However, you must not suppose that Tom was quarrelsome. In those days boys settled their differences with fisticuffs, just as men did with pistols and swords; those who had felt Tom's prowess were often his best friends, and the small and weak lads almost worshiped him because he protected them from the big bullies. Also, if a boy did anything which he, Tommy, considered mean or wicked, he wanted to thrash that boy, and sometimes he did. No doubt his judgment was often at fault and his wrath more or less foolish; yet it had a kind of pugnacious nobility

about it, too. For the rest, Master Tom had any amount of vanity — we go far and away beyond our sisters in that, my boys — and he was possessed of a devouring ambition to enter the navy.

At that time, as you know, General Napoleon Bonaparte was turning Europe topsy-turvy with his wars. Like most English boys, Tom believed religiously that General Bonaparte was the wickedest man in the world ; consequently, he wanted to thrash him. I do not mean that he entertained thoughts of a personal combat, or of planting his small fist on the First Consul's nose ; but, in a general way, he wanted to have his share in the great struggle which England was waging against Bonaparte and France. I suppose that the feeling combined itself naturally with a longing for sea-life, which Tom had in common with many another, and this alone would account for his naval aspirations.

But any healthy boy, situated as Tom was, would have dreamed of ships and glory. The school was only three miles from the great naval station at Plymouth, which, just then, was in a state of intense activity. It was said that Bonaparte was preparing to invade England, and every hulk that could carry a gun was put in commission to guard the coasts ; the dockyards rang with hammers day and night ; Plymouth streets were thronged with sailors and soldiers ; and from a playground overlooking the harbor the boys could see scores of great vessels, their sides bris-

ting with guns, and boats moving about with the steady stroke of man-of-war's men ; sometimes a naval salute pealed across the water, or the yards were manned in honor of an admiral.

Tom watched this pageant daily with longing eyes, and by dint of persistent questioning he managed to pick up quite a stock of naval lore. There was a crusty old wooden-legged sailor who dwelt hard by ; a hero of Aboukir, if his own story was to be credited. Tommy discovered that this veteran had an insatiable longing for tobacco, and that he was willing to exchange information for the same ; so the boy invested most of his small allowance in surreptitious packages, from which he doled out rations to the old fellow every holiday afternoon ; the veteran smoked, and Tommy sneezed, because the tobacco was of a very searching quality ; and he would sit thus for hours, listening to such yarns as only a sailor can spin, and believing them, too, every word. Now I suspect that Jack was more accustomed to yarn-spinning than to having his yarns believed. At any rate, Tom's credulity gratified him ; and when he learned of the boy's ambition to be a sailor, he began to instruct him in such parts of ship-lore as could be acquired on land ; the tying of knots, the names of sails and ropes illustrated by a rough model, and so on. The result of all this cramming was that Tom became the acknowledged naval authority of the school, and his longing for the sea grew stronger than ever. He even broached the subject to his father, who, about this time, paid him a short

visit. The squire looked thoughtful for a moment, — Tom was a younger son, and the naval profession is an honorable one, — but in the end he shook his head and advised sticking to books. In justice to the boy, I must say that he never thought of disobeying his father ; but the squire's parting tip of five shillings went mainly for tobacco and naval yarns.

One day a French prize came up the Sound : a frigate, torn and battered, but with the British jack floating proudly above the tricolor ; no wonder that the boys cheered, the masters looking on indulgently and half ready to join them. As it was a holiday, the older boys received permission to walk in to Plymouth under the guidance of a master ; and if that gentleman had any breath left when he got there, it was n't the fault of his pupils. The streets were gay with naval uniforms, and boats were darting hither and thither about the harbor ; but Tom had no eyes except for the ships, and among them he soon saw the prize riding quietly at anchor. Standing a little apart, he watched it for a long time ; and his heart swelled as he marked the black rows of guns and the splintered holes and disordered rigging, tokens of a rough combat.

"Well, my little fellow," said a voice beside him, "it's worth something to see the old English bunting above that flag."

Tom turned and saw a gentleman in the uniform of a naval lieutenant ; a tall man, clean shaved according to the fashion of the time, and with the

pleasantest face, he thought, that he had ever seen. "Do you know what that means?" asked the officer, smiling and pointing to the name, *L'Indomptable*, on the frigate's stern.

"It means 'the unconquerable,' sir," answered Tom, rather proud of his French; his mother had been educated in Paris, and had taught him almost as soon as he could speak. "But that did n't keep her from being captured," he added quickly.

"Indeed it did n't. The French may put high-sounding names on their ships, but they 'll never rule the ocean while there's good British oak with stout British tars behind it. This one made a smart fight, though."

"Oh, please, sir, were you there? Will you tell me about it?" cried Tommy, with sparkling eyes.

The officer smiled again at his enthusiasm. "No, I was n't there, I'm sorry to say; but I know Lieutenant Frazer, who brought in this conquered 'Unconquerable.'" And to Tommy's delight he recounted the story: how a British frigate had sighted the *Indomptable* off Brest, and had given chase; how the Frenchmen had made for the open Atlantic until, being outsailed, they were forced to turn; how the vessels had manœuvred for position during an hour, and then fought for two hours; how at length the British got close alongside, lashed the frigates together, and poured a storm of boarders over the enemy's deck; how the French captain was killed by a musket-ball, and, most of the other officers being dead or

wounded, the tricolor had been hauled down while the guns were yet thundering below and the men fighting and cheering. When it came to that, Tommy was so excited that he pulled off his cap and burst into a rousing hurrah, in which he was joined by several listening bystanders.

The officer laughed. "You're a true Briton," he said, "and ought to be in the navy yourself. What's your name, my boy?"

"Tom, sir; Tommy Reeves."

"Reeves, eh? And where do you live?"

"I'm at school now, sir; the Priory, three miles from here. But my father lives at Danford Hall; he's Squire Reeves."

"Hullo!" exclaimed the lieutenant; "upon my word, I believe we're cousins; cousins once removed, that is. If you're the son of Reeves of Danford Hall, then your grandfather and my father were brothers."

"Oh! then you are Lieutenant Maurice?"

"Yes; that's my name. Well, cousin Tommy, I'm glad to meet you, anyway," and he shook hands warmly. "By the way, I'm going to Danford Hall to-morrow; the squire invited me to spend a week with him, but I can only get away for two days."

"Oh, dear!" cried Tommy, "I wish I could be there."

"So do I. Well, never mind," added the lieutenant, kindly; "come and dine with me to-day."

"Oh, sir, I should like to so much! would you go with me to ask the master?"

The master was found near by, and Tom, as he walked up to the school group, tried to look as if he were not the proudest boy in the world ; introducing " my cousin, Lieutenant Maurice " with a fine air of being quite used to such company. " And please, sir," he added, " the lieutenant has asked me to dine with him."

The master hesitated ; he liked the looks of Lieutenant Maurice, but in those days naval officers were often hard drinkers, sometimes ending their repasts under the table. " Master Reeves is not accustomed to wine," he said.

" Oh, that 's all right," responded the lieutenant ; " no one will be there, except my friend Frazer, — the officer who brought that prize in, — and we are both temperate men. I like the boy," he added frankly, " and, with your permission, shall be very glad of his company. If you will let him stay, I promise to see him safe at the school by eight o'clock." The master gave his permission, and Master Tom strode off beside his tall cousin, perfectly aware that he was followed by thirty pairs of admiring eyes.

And what a day that was for the boy ! First they went to the dockyards, where a great ship lay on the stocks almost ready for launching ; and Lieutenant Maurice explained everything, and answered a hundred eager questions without a sign of impatience. Files of red-coated soldiers, the rows of cannon lying on the ground and the stacks of cannon-balls, the rope-walks and sail-lofts and shops, all came in for inspection. Then, to the

boy's inexpressible delight, they rowed out to one of the frigates, where the lieutenant — he seemed to know everybody — was greeted by a brother officer ; they were shown over the vessel from stem to stern, and the sailors touched their hats to them. Tom was introduced to Midshipman Ned Brown, a boy of about his own age, who pronounced him "jolly green, but a good one, you know," and offered to race him up the mizzen-shrouds ; and Tom raced him, and did fairly well, too, until he came to the cross-trees, which he could n't get over until the middy showed him how. Master Ned offered to take him higher, but Tom wisely declined ; so the boys sat on the cross-trees, which looked to be about a thousand feet above the deck, though in reality they were forty-five ; and the middy kicked his feet nonchalantly and talked of his last cruise, and how they had captured two French merchantmen ; and Tom clung deliriously to a rope, and was perfectly happy except when he thought of going down again. He did get down, without any serious exhibition of awkwardness, and if he was afraid he did not show it ; the officers clapped him on the back and called him a little trump, and Tom was quite sure they were right. Altogether, it was a most exciting experience ; and though, in telling it next day, Tom did not intentionally exaggerate, his schoolmates believed implicitly that he had climbed quite to the top of the mast and seated himself on the very tip, if, indeed, he had not stood on it.

Returning, they had dinner at the inn, and

Lieutenant Frazer was there ; a weather-beaten seaman, but so kindly and frank that Tom forgot his awe, and even asked questions about the capture of the French frigate. Frazer, once started, went through the whole story, telling it, indeed, better than Lieutenant Maurice had done, because he had been in the fight himself ; Tom's awe returned when he found that he was actually talking with the man who had led the boarders. Both the officers made much of the boy, and they were sensible enough to give him only plain food and drink ; so when Lieutenant Maurice ordered a carriage, Tom was sufficiently tired, to be sure, but none the worse for his experiences. As they drove to the school he was very quiet, but a great scheme was working in his mind.

"What are you thinking about?" his cousin asked at length.

"Oh, please, sir — did you mean what you said — about the navy, you know?"

The lieutenant looked puzzled. "What did I say?" he asked.

"That I ought to be in the navy ; if you please, you said so ; before you knew who I was."

"Did I say that? Well, we certainly want smart boys, and you would do, I think. But it's a matter for your father to decide."

"Oh, but, sir, — you're going to see him ; would you mind — very much — asking him to let me go? It's — it's grand! And I want to fight Boney! Do you think they would take me for a cabin boy?" he asked anxiously.

"Bless you, never think of such a thing! If you went to sea it would be as a midshipman."

"Could I?" cried Tom excitedly.

"Well, well; don't set your heart on it. Good-by and good luck, cousin Tommy."

"Good-by, sir; and thank you ever so much. And if you will just put in a word for me—" he pleaded.

"I'll think of it," said the lieutenant, as he drove off.

He did think of it, and two days after he had a long talk with Squire Reeves. Tom never knew what arguments he used, but I fancy they included an appeal to the squire's patriotism; not that Tom could be expected to do much for king and country yet awhile, but he could be training for future work, and, under the protection of Lieutenant Maurice, would have unusual advantages. His age was no impediment; much younger boys entered the navy.

So one morning Tom was called to the visitor's room, where he found his father standing, with a grave face. He shook hands, and then, with a new tenderness, bent and kissed the curly head. Finally he drew from his pocket a great paper with an official seal.

"Tom," he said, "this is your appointment as midshipman, and God bless you!"

II

MR. MIDSHIPMAN REEVES

MR. MIDSHIPMAN THOMAS REEVES passed the ensuing ten days in a blaze of glory. With his father, he first drove in to Plymouth, where rooms were taken at an inn and a certain famous tailor was summoned. In due time this gentleman appeared, all smiles and obsequiousness ; and Tom, being turned over to him, was carefully measured and recorded to the minute fraction of an inch. But his modest suggestion that the uniform be delivered at six o'clock on the next morning was received by Mr. Snip with nothing less than holy horror ; he was assured that, so important a matter required the utmost deliberation, and at least two weeks of sleepless anxiety and labor. After much argument, Tom, or rather his father, compromised on three days, the uniform to be sent by coach to Danford ; and Mr. Snip retired with the air of one overwhelmed with responsibility ; which Tom regarded as an eminently proper frame of mind. Then there was the great cocked hat which midshipmen wore on state occasions in those days ; a gorgeous thing, and peculiarly pleasing to Tom. The purchase of a sword followed, a real sword, though only a little one, or dirk, as it was called ;

and Tom, as he held it, dreamed of leading a string of boarders over the side and of pinning the horrified French captain to his own mast ; and when he cut his thumb in testing the blade, he wrapped the wounded member in his handkerchief and did not even mention it. Then, still with his father, he reported on board "my ship," for he had already been assigned to one. Tom felt rather aggrieved to find that it was only an eighteen-gun brig, but was consoled when he learned that it would be a temporary home ; the Hotspur was going out to Barbados in charge of Lieutenant Maurice, but at the end of his voyage the lieutenant was to rejoin his own ship, the Centaur, seventy-four, taking Tom with him. At present the Hotspur was almost deserted, for she had just been put in commission and the commander had not yet arrived. They were received by an under officer, the new midshipman's name was duly entered on the books, and he was given formal leave of absence for eight days, to visit his family. "Mr. Reeves," said the officer, shaking hands with him, "you're in the king's service now ; I congratulate you, and may you live to be an admiral. Remember what Nelson said : ' Fear God, honor the King, and hate a Frenchman as you would the Devil.' I'll just venture to offer another word of advice ; don't monkey with that dirk until you've had a turn or two with the fencing-master ; it's dangerous." Tom was inclined to resent the last remark, but he only said "Thank you, sir ;" and the officer clapped him on the back and

winked at the squire in a very undignified manner. Tom wondered if other naval men were like him.

At the inn no one knew that Tom was a full-fledged midshipman until he privately confided the great fact to the chambermaid. "Lawks, now!" she exclaimed; "it's a pity, and you such a fine young lad! I 'ad a brother was a midshipman, leastways a ship's boy, which it's the same, I take it; sailed from London town 'e did, this blessed month four years ago, for go to sea 'e would, though warned most faithful. And the way they treated that boy it was scandalous, if I say it as is 'is sister. Set 'im to swabbing the mast they did for days and days, and 'e clinging for 'is life over briny billows as was rolling mountings 'igh, and weeping scalding tears into the slush-bucket; and if 'e did but utter a word, they laid on to 'im with a rope's end till 'e was a mass of bruises 'orrible to behold. And the food not fit for 'eathen cannibals, though you scarce will believe the delicate that 'is happetite was along of they orful pitchings and torsings; which 'e do assure me that pork was hagony to him, though 'e 'ave ever cherished it in 'appier days, and for lobsclout and treacle 'e could not abide them. Now let me fetch you a bite of something and a cup of tea, for it's little you'll get where you're going." Tom accepted the proffered refreshment, though he could not help thinking that the chambermaid was very ignorant; so he kindly enlightened her as to the vast difference between a midshipman

and a ship's boy. But the chambermaid only shook her head pityingly, and poured him out another cup of tea in quite a motherly manner. Tom concluded that she was unappreciative.

Next morning they had an early breakfast, and at five o'clock took coach for Danford; the squire comfortably ensconced inside, and Tom perched beside the driver. How he despised his school clothes!

"Going far, sir?" asked the driver affably.

"Only to Danford at present," responded Tom, "but I shall return in a week on my way to Barbados."

"Don't know the place, sir; some'eres in Corn'all, been't it? That ud be the Bodmin coach, but it's a desp'rit bad road."

"Barbados is an island near South America," said Tom impressively, "and I'm going there as an officer on one of His Majesty's ships."

The driver whistled, and grinned broadly. "They be putting wery young ossifers aboard these days, been't they, sir?" he remarked. "Might I ask if you be a capting?"

"No," retorted Tom, "I have my rating as midshipman."

"Oh, I knows now," said the driver placidly; "one o' them little chaps in jackets wot allus rides on top and mostly fires at the 'osses' ears with pea-shooters. 'Ad two of 'em last trip up, and wery nice young lads they was; give me a shilling when they left, same as a grown gen'leman might."

Tom affected to gaze at the landscape; but

presently remembered that he had a pea-shooter in his pocket, and that the horses' ears certainly would make excellent marks. There was a precedent for it and — well, five minutes later Tom pulled the pea-shooter out with a very red face. During the remainder of the journey he was on excellent terms with the driver, and on leaving he gave that worthy a bright new shilling.

At Danford the great family coach was waiting to carry them to the Hall. The servants touched their hats and were "glad to see young master again before he leaves for furrin parts," and when the squire asked for home news he was told, "The missis be main well, but grievin' like; and the young ladies they can't talk enough about Master Tom and what a brave young chap he be to take ship and all." This was incense to Tom, you may be sure, and during the four-mile drive to the Hall his tongue flew like a shuttle, the squire listening indulgently, and now and then slipping in an admonition or a word of advice.

And then the home-coming! The family was gathered in the great doorway, and Tom's mother clasped him in her arms and tried to speak, but only broke down and cried on his shoulder; Tom forgot glory and everything, and only remembered that he loved his mother better than all the world beside, and that he was going to leave her. "Don't cry, mother," he said; but he was crying himself; the servants were all sniffing, and even the squire wiped his eyes. It was Madam Reeves who smiled first through her tears, kissing him as

she turned him over to his sisters. "Don't mind me, dear," she said ; "I shall always be proud of you."

Tom's sisters (his elder brother was at Oxford) made so much of him that it was a wonder he did not burst with vanity. Every servant, from the old housekeeper to the gardener's boy, waited on his word as if he had been a prince ; indeed, most of them believed that he was about to take command of a frigate, if not of an entire fleet ; and Tom did not undeceive them, not he ! That night, as he dreamed of battle and storm, he did not know that his mother, by his bedside, was praying that storm and battle might leave him unscathed, and that, through God's grace, her child might be restored to her.

Next day there were visits and congratulations ; Tom was asked out to dinner, and even old Lord Fitzadam shook hands with him and told him that he would be an ornament to His Majesty's service ; as if Tom had n't known that before ! In due time the new uniform arrived, and the squire abetted him in smuggling in the precious package, unknown to the family, for it was a secret as yet. Tom put the clothes on in the solitude of his own room, and was going to strap the dirk to his side ; but being uncertain whether it should hang on the right side or the left, he wisely put it under his arm. Thus arrayed, in all the brilliance of broadcloth and brass buttons, he stole downstairs and walked majestically into the drawing-room. Never was surprise better planned or more successful. There was a shout of admiration ; the

girls rushed on him, he was dragged to a sofa, and in a moment was enthroned between his mother and Annie, with Bess standing off to gaze at him, and the squire laughing and rubbing his hands. If there was a prouder boy in England Tom did n't know of him.

The climax was at dinner : the whole family was there, and in the end the squire called in all the servants and ordered glasses to be filled for them and for Tom himself. Solemnly rising, he made a speech full of loyalty and feeling, and ended by proposing the health of " my son, Midshipman Thomas Reeves of His Majesty's navy ; here 's to a fortunate voyage and a speedy return, and may he never shame the flag he serves under." The girls clapped their hands, and the servants cheered, and Tom rose with a very red face and said : " Thank you, sir ; I mean to come back with an honorable record or not at all ; and I propose, first, the King, God bless him ! and next, the kindest father and the dearest mother in all England." " Full glasses !" cried the squire. " Tom, I 'm proud of you. God save the King, and long life to the King's navy ! " I do not commend the drinking, but it was the fashion of the time. The squire, indeed, was a temperate man ; so Tom got no more than his one glass of wine, and he did not wake with a headache next morning.

All things earthly must have an end. One misty morning Tom had to take the mail-coach again ; inside, this time, by his father, and very sober, with his mother's kiss on his cheek and his

mother's sad face fresh in his memory. She had held out nobly to the last, telling him to be brave and true to king and country. "And Tom, dear," she had said, "I am glad you are going, and proud to have you in the king's service. But, oh, Tom, never let me regret the gift! I would rather know that you were dead than to hear that you had become selfish and wicked. I shall pray for you night and morning, and God will watch over you, I know. There is a little prayer-book and a Bible in your box." Tom had thrown his arms around his mother's neck, and, with tears streaming down his cheeks, had promised to read the books often and to be true to their teachings and hers. And I don't think that he ever forgot the promise or regretted it.

From Plymouth they went over to the school, where Tom, in his new uniform and cocked hat, made a tremendous sensation. At the squire's instance, the boys received a half-holiday, and there was a game of cricket in which Tom held a wicket nobly and made twenty-two runs. Then there was a grand dinner, — paid for out of the squire's pocket, — and finally Tom was driven off amid wild cheers, in which even the masters joined. Half the boys wrote home next day that they must join the navy or die; but as none of them did enter the service, and as most of them lived to a comfortable old age, I suppose the feeling wore off.

The old sailor was not forgotten; they stopped at his cottage, and the veteran hobbled out, grumbling, but touched his forelock in astonish-

ment when he saw Tom in his new garb. "Belay all!" he shouted, as Tom was for shaking hands; "I knows my place, and never shall it be said that Jack Riffins forgot what's due to a king's ossifer. If you be Master Tummus, — which it ain't reasonable, and yet you've got the face of him, — I umbly thanks your honor for this 'ere wisit, and glad I am to see you in the king's togs. Sarvice, sir," touching his forelock again to the squire; "if you been't too proud to come alongside of a old hulk like me, I'd be proud to have you both sit inside." But Tom only had time to deliver a great package of tobacco, to which the squire added five shillings, and they drove off again, the old sailor standing and pulling his forelock at intervals until they were out of sight.

Next morning Tom reported on board; and he hardly knew the brig, it had been so metamorphosed with paint and scrubbing brushes; it was crowded with sailors, and everybody seemed busy; yet there was not the least jostling or confusion. Lieutenant Maurice himself stood on the quarter-deck, a great deal more ceremonious and severe than he had been at their first meeting; but he greeted the squire cordially, congratulated Tom, and took them both to his cabin. "Remember, cousin Tom," he said pleasantly, "on this brig I am your superior officer, and you are simply Mr. Midshipman Reeves. I shall look after your welfare, of course, but I would not make a favorite of you if I could. You will be quartered with the other midshipmen, and in general I shall treat you

just as I do them. Of course, you must not presume to come in here without invitation ; that would be contrary to all rule." Tom saw the justice of this, though his heart sank for a moment when he thought how friendless he would be. "How am I to learn my duties, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, there are officers to instruct you ; we have no regular schoolmaster, but you will find one on the Centaur. Do your duty, sir, obey orders, don't shirk, and try to learn all that you can about the ship ; remember that you must be a sailor before you can be an efficient officer. I hope to see you an ornament to the service, but it depends on your own efforts, not on me nor anybody else." The squire nodded vigorously at these sentiments, which were quite in keeping with his own advice ; and Tom was half frightened, and yet felt a new dignity, quite different from the conceit he had been indulging in. "I'll do my best, sir," he said quite humbly. The commander shook hands with him again, and soon presented him formally to the facetious officer whom they had met before ; Tom was quite surprised to find that he was a lieutenant also ; he had yet to learn the niceties of grade. Lieutenant Sharp led the way to the great gun-room—a lower deck, open through nearly the whole length of the vessel, and with rows of iron guns by open portholes. Passing to a side room where several officers were sitting, the lieutenant carelessly introduced Tom as "Mr. Reeves, a new midshipman, gentlemen." The officers looked up and nodded, and then went on talking and smoking.

"Sorry we could n't man the yards for you," remarked his guide, "but it 's against orders. You 'll find some more youngsters about somewhere; mostly in mischief, I 'll lay a guinea; and unless your looks belie you, you 'll be the worst of the lot." With that he disappeared.

Tom sat down on a coil of rope, feeling dreadfully homesick and lonesome, and half ready to cry. But presently three middies rushed up, and, to his delight, one of them was Ned Brown, who had raced him up the mizzen-shrouds. The young gentleman stopped and stared, and then threw up his cap and clapped his hand in Tom's. "Now this is what I call jolly!" he exclaimed; "why, I never expected to see you again, and here you are in a jacket, just as cool! Going out in the brig? She's a darling, you know, and we mess with the officers; the grub's no end. I'm transferred to the Centaur. You too? Hurrah! What larks we 'll have!" In two minutes Tom was on easy terms with all the boys, who were eagerly showing him over the vessel, inquiring after his box, asking where his berth was (which Tom did n't in the least know), and otherwise making themselves agreeable. Tom thought them very like school-boys, and was convinced that a brig-of-war was the most delightful place in the world. His father, on leaving the vessel, sought for him in vain until he discovered all the boys seated on one of the yards — Tom next the mast — and chattering away like a row of cockatoos on a perch.

By his own request, Tom slept on board that

night. As the brig was small and crowded, the midshipmen used their few berths only for luggage, and slept in the great gun-room. His place being pointed out, Tom took his first lesson in the mysteries of a hammock ; Master Ned showed him how to unroll and stow it ; and the hammock being duly hung, Tom climbed in on one side, gingerly, and immediately rolled out on the other. After one or two like failures, he managed to ensconce himself in the thing, and went to sleep with the sensation of lying on a piece of tape with a yawning precipice on each side of him. In the morning he was awakened by one of the other midshipmen, who was industriously blacking his nose with charcoal.

During the next two days he attended muster, and was instructed in some of the simpler duties by Lieutenant Sharp, who was as facetious as ever, but not at all unkind ; Tom soon learned to like him very well. His father came off to see him every afternoon, and once Tom dined on shore, being duly granted leave of absence. Then came the final moment, when the sailors were preparing to weigh anchor, and the squire was standing in the gangway with a suspicious moisture in his eyes as he said good-by.

“ Never tell a lie, Tom, and never be afraid to do right. God keep you, my boy ! ”

The last link with home was parted, and Tom broke down utterly and cried for full five minutes. He was only a child, after all.

III

COMMODORE HOOD

THIS history has little to do with the passage of the Hotspur to Barbados, which was much like other voyages, except for the stern discipline of a man-of-war. To be sure, it was all new to Tom, and after his first tussle with seasickness he enjoyed it amazingly. Of his cousin he saw little; twice he dined in the cabin by invitation, — all the officers shared the commander's table by turn, — and now and then he received a word of friendly advice from him. The other officers were good-natured, though sometimes rough, and in the main Tom did very well, because he really wanted to learn.

Midshipmen were apprentices in the navy, but apprentices in the higher branch; that is, they were training to be officers. Nominally they ranked as the highest of the "forecastle" officers, and hence were the superiors of all others in the fore-castle, as well as of the common seamen; practically they stood between the quarter-deck and fore-castle, and socially were rather with the former. In point of fact, they had no authority at all at first; but as they learned their work, they were gradually intrusted with more and

more responsible duties, and in case of necessity might even have separate commands. Many boys — Nelson among them — began their sea-life in a lower station ; but those of good families frequently obtained their midshipmen's berths at once, as Tom had. Large ships often carried a score or more, a schoolmaster was assigned to them, and their education was as carefully attended to as it would have been on shore ; but on small vessels, and under careless commanders, they were simply allowed to pick up knowledge as best they could. In any case, they were treated as became their station. Of course, being healthy young Britons, they were quite as full of mischief as other boys ; but the officers tolerated their pranks, and at times even shielded them from deserved punishment. Everybody liked the mid-dies, just as everybody likes a bright schoolboy.

It was fortunate for Tom that his cousin was a model commander ; there was plenty of discipline and hard work on the brig, but no tyranny. In the mess-room Tom heard much that was coarse and wicked, but he learned also to be ashamed of it, as a disgrace to the ship and the service. Besides, he had so much to do and learn that his mind could hardly have found room for anything else. Some of the duties were not nearly so easy as he had imagined they would be. There was the matter of the watches, for instance ; it seemed so simple, and it was so very, very hard at the beginning. His first watch began at four o'clock in the afternoon ; that was easy enough, and when

night began to fall he remained on deck, chatting with Ned, until eight bells sounded for eight o'clock; then he had supper, and, by Ned's advice, turned into his hammock and went to sleep. Somewhere in dreamland he was rudely startled by an earthquake; so it seemed, but it was only Ned shaking him.

"Turn out! turn out!" cried his friend. "It's eight bells,—midnight, you know,—and our watch."

"A-l-l r-i-g-h-t," said Tom, opening his eyes. Then he shut them again, just for a second, and was away in dreamland.

"Tom! Mr. Midshipman Thomas Reeves! wake up, hang it! Oh, my eyes, ain't he sleepy though! Do you hear?"

"Ye-es," with a great yawn; "I'm coming." Dreamland again for half a minute. Tattoo of Ned's fists in his ribs.

"L-let me alone, can't you!"

"Now here's a lovely mess," soliloquized Master Ned. "He'll get into a scrape if I don't pull him out of that. Tom!"

"Cut his hammock rope," suggested one. "Build a fire under him," said another.

"Tom, darling, the ship's on a rock! Conflagration in the powder magazine! French frigate firing into us! Mutiny forward! Oh, my eyes, *won't* he wake up?"

"Fling a cup of water over him," growled the quartermaster. "That'll bring him to if anything will."

Master Ned, nothing loath, procured a huge ladle of cold water and proceeded to operate on Tom therewith ; the watch which had just come down assisting with much sage advice. Ned saw a chance for fun and improved it. First he let a few drops fall on the sleeper's nose ; Tom sneezed, and turned over. Then the water trickled across his cheek.

"Don't !" murmured Tom, putting his hand up.

"Set the ladle on his ear and make some tea in it," said an officer, laughing. "Plaster his hair with the water," proffered another. "Run a tackle to the windlass and haul him out," suggested a third. What might have happened is a problem ; for just then somebody gave Ned's elbow a rap, and ladle and water splashed over Tom's head. There was a roar of laughter as he sat up, pretty thoroughly awakened now. He put on his clothes and ascended the companion ladder with a very sheepish face. Ned touched his hat to the officer of the deck and grinned.

"Mr. Reeves overslept himself, sir, and I had to help him dress."

"I dare say," said the officer, laughing ; "it's his first night watch. Walk him up and down a bit." After an hour poor Tom was allowed to turn in again, and in a few days he had grown accustomed to the routine. But some wag suggested "infant baptism" as a description of the ladle affair, and it was long before he heard the last of it.

The boys were rather encouraged to fraternize with the able seamen, who, on their side, never

wearied of instructing them. There was one sailor, Ralph Dempsey by name, with whom Tom struck up quite a friendship. He was a huge, loose-jointed fellow, of forty or thereabouts, very good-natured, and an adept in sea-art, having served in almost every quarter of the globe; now, after twenty-five years of hard work, he was going out to join the Centaur, as poor as when he started. Ralph taught the boy all the abstruse science of ropes and blocks; explained every sail over and over again, with all the maze of lines that go to make the rigging, even of a small vessel; how to polish brass and holystone the deck and sew canvas; how cargo and arms and ammunition should be stored; and how clouds and sea could be read for tokens of the weather. As for climbing, being a boy, Tom learned that by instinct; before the voyage ended he was as much at home aloft as any sailor, and could even reef a little on a light sail. Twice, I regret to say, he ascended the rigging under very strict orders; being, in fact, mastheaded for boyish breaches of discipline. But as that was a pretty common occurrence with the midshipmen, it did not weigh heavily on his soul.

At his cousin's suggestion, he took up the first rudiments of navigation, under the instruction of Lieutenant Sharp. That officer varied his boxing of the compass and shots at the sun with a good many whimsical remarks, but, on the whole, Tom made very fair progress. Then there was fencing, in which, at first, he showed rather more vigor

than skill. Nearly every day some of the black cannon were trained through the portholes, and the crew took lessons in gunnery; twice the decks were cleared as for a regular action, and a mimic battle was fought with only the rushing waves to answer the thunder of their guns. In the intervals there was drill for boarders and to repel boarders, and in clearing away boats; all this going on amid the regular duties of the vessel, which were endless. Lieutenant Maurice was only temporary commander of the Hotspur; but he rightly held that every voyage should leave his crew better trained. Tom, who had fancied that naval life was rather lazy in the main, was a good deal surprised at the reality.

There were calms, the water rolling away silky and dark, and a gale, which made Tom seasick again, and then the sparkle and rush of the trade-wind, sweeping them into the tropics among flying fish and porpoises and floating patches of gulf-weed. Finally, one morning, a long, low, cloudlike mass in the southwest; and before noon they were anchored in the harbor of Bridgetown, Barbados.

I hardly know what Tom had expected to see; vast tropical forests, perhaps, and Indians gaudy with feathers. What he did see was a small town, not unlike an English one, except for the tile roofs and a few cocoanut palms in front; beyond it, miles and miles of bright sugar-cane fields; and around the brig a swarm of boats manned by half-naked, chattering negroes. Some of these brought

fruits to sell, — golden oranges and bananas and mangoes, — and one had a monkey. Tom and Ned bought more fruit than they could eat, and what they did eat gave them frightful stomach-aches, for they insisted on trying every kind.

Several war vessels were lying at anchor in the bay. Towering over all was a splendid ship of the line, with three rows of guns frowning from her sides, and the broad pennant of a commodore floating above; they had saluted in passing, and word went round that the ship was the *Centaur*. Lieutenant Maurice reported on board her almost immediately, and shortly after the *Hotspur* was turned over to a new commander.

That evening Tom was leaning over the bulwark and talking with Ned, when his cousin approached and put his hand kindly on the boy's shoulder. Both the middies stood up very straight and touched their hats; but the lieutenant laughed.

"Never mind that now," said he; "I'm only a passenger here this evening;" and he went on chatting pleasantly for half an hour. "Now mind," said he on leaving them, "you must look your smartest in the morning, for you are going to the *Centaur*, and I shall present you to the commodore."

What a furbishing of jackets there was, to be sure! When they put off in the captain's gig next morning, Tom was secretly rehearsing a little speech; but fortunately he forgot it in his admiration of the *Centaur*. And she was a glorious sight,

lying there on the placid water with every spar and rope sharp against the blue sky. A ship of the line, in those days, was a very different thing from the iron forts that make up our modern navies ; but she was quite as interesting, and a great deal more picturesque. She carried more men, too ; the Centaur had nearly a thousand, all told, including over two hundred marines, whose uniforms were conspicuous on the decks. As they passed to the commodore's cabin, Tom gazed with wonder at the long rows of guns and the stacks of muskets and cutlasses, all stowed with exquisite neatness ; every plank as white as water and sand could make it, and every bit of brass polished like a mirror. Even the cabin showed a mingling of war with spotless neatness and elegance. It was curtained, there was a bookcase against the side, and trays over the table showed sparkling silverware ; but half a dozen great guns were trained to the portholes, and by removing a bulkhead the room itself could be joined to the upper gun-deck.

Captain and Acting Commodore Sir Samuel Hood was a tall, noble-looking man, with the air of one accustomed to command, and a face that could be gentle or stern. " Ah, Mr. Maurice," he said cordially, " glad to see you ; I suppose these are the lads you spoke of." Tom and Ned were duly presented, and Sir Samuel shook hands as unceremoniously as possible, introducing them to Captain Maxwell, who commanded the Centaur under him. Then he chatted pleasantly for a few

minutes, asking about the boys' families and their home-life; they, who had hardly hoped for a word from so exalted a personage, were almost too much astonished to speak. But the climax was to come. Rising to show that the interview was at an end, Sir Samuel said, "Mr. Maurice, I breakfast with the governor to-day, and you are invited to join us. I told his excellency that I should bring a couple of my midshipmen; and if these young gentlemen have no previous engagements, I shall be glad to include them in the party. Full uniforms, of course; and my boat will take us off an hour from now."

The lieutenant and the middies bowed their acknowledgments and retired. "My eyes!" whispered Ned, "we *have* fallen on roses this time. Ain't he a delightful old brick, though! Glory? Oh, no! Going off in the commodore's barge; *and* going to take breakfast with him; *and* the governor! Tom, I'm in a blue funk; it's too much!"

"Please, sir," questioned Tom of his cousin, "was it quite proper for us to accept?"

"Of course it was," answered the lieutenant, laughing. "Such an invitation is equivalent to a command, and it would never do to decline. You are wonderfully lucky, though, and I was a good deal surprised; such condescension is n't common, I can tell you, though it's like Sir Samuel; and I've heard that Nelson often does the same thing."

The boys duly went off with the commodore,

followed by many admiring eyes, and they carried themselves through the affair very creditably. Needless to say that Tom's next letter home contained several pages about his Breakfast in Barbados ; — and if I have written Breakfast with a capital B it is because Tom did. Needless also to record that from that day the boys worshiped Sir Samuel Hood, and either one would have boarded a frigate single-handed at his command. They found, presently, that the number of Commodore Hood's admirers on the Centaur was precisely equal to the number of the officers and crew.

IV

DIAMOND ROCK

THE Caribbean Islands, or the West Indies east of the Caribbean Sea, were, for a century, the scene of frequent struggles between the English and the French. Barbados itself remained a British possession from its first settlement ; but nearly all the other islands changed hands at least once, and in some cases half a dozen times. Just before the period of our story, for instance, St. Lucia had been seized by the English ; but Martinique, immediately north of it, still remained in the hands of the French, and Fort-de-France, its principal port, was strongly fortified. Commodore Hood was ordered to blockade this and other French islands ; that is, to prevent the entrance and exit of merchant as well as war vessels, and to capture every one bearing the French flag. With the merits of this kind of warfare we have nothing to do, any more than Master Tom had ; Commodore Hood obeyed orders, and if he confiscated unarmed ships, he was never unkind to his captives. War is a cruel sport at best, and perhaps the evils it inflicts on commerce do more than anything else to incline nations to peace.

During the next two months the Centaur cruised

about among the islands, always on the lookout for French vessels. During this time she chased several merchantmen and captured three or four — a foregone conclusion if she got near enough, for the Frenchmen never attempted to resist ; the tri-color being hauled down, a prize crew would be sent on board and the vessel would sail away to Barbados or Jamaica as quietly as if she had only taken on a few passengers. One long chase furnished a little excitement ; but in the main it was very tame work, and not at all up to Tom's ideas of war. However, he had plenty to do, and being quick and reasonably industrious, he soon gained a fair standing with schoolmaster and officers. In leisure moments he was never tired of watching the scenery of these beautiful mountain islands, so different from England, with their precipices and forest-covered slopes and white sand-beaches lined with cocoanut palms.

One day they were lying just within the passage which separates Martinique from St. Lucia ; Commodore Hood spent much of his time here, for it was the ordinary route for vessels bound to Fort-de-France. Now the wind, in these latitudes, blows almost constantly from the northeast, that is, from the open Atlantic ; and of course, a French captain coming in with it would be keenly on the lookout for hostile ships ; in those days, you must remember, there were no steamers, and all vessels had to depend on their sails. To conceal the Centaur somewhat, she was stationed behind the Diamond Rock.

This rock was quite large enough for the purpose, for it was six hundred feet high, though hardly broader at the base. It was, in fact, a little island, about a mile from the southwestern point of Martinique, with deep water all around ; Tom thought it must have been split off from the Martinique mountains, and he used to wonder if anybody ever landed on it. In point of fact, I believe that the Martinique fishermen did sometimes land at the western base, where the sea was comparatively smooth ; but certainly, up to that time, nobody had attempted to scale the rock itself. On the southern side, indeed, it was a sheer precipice, and towards the east it actually overhung the boiling surf ; with even a moderate wind the foam on that side was flung eighty feet into the air. Northward, or towards Martinique, the side sloped, but very steeply, and was broken by cliffs ; the slope was grassy in places, and a few bushes and " Judas-trees " clung to crevices of the rock, among spiny cactuses and bromelias. Altogether, the Diamond had a most inhospitable appearance.

Just at that moment, the crew of the Centaur was less interested in the rock than in a French brig which was cautiously approaching from the east ; of course, the Diamond concealed it from them, but boats had been watching the stranger all the morning. It is important to note that this incoming vessel had the usual northeast wind in her favor ; whereas the Centaur, if she attempted to intercept her, would be obliged to tack. For this reason, the English wished to let the brig

get as near as possible before sallying out in chase.

Perhaps the French vessel suspected something ; at any rate, she shifted her helm and sidled off towards the St. Lucia shore, here about ten miles to the south. On that, the Centaur gave chase with every possible sail set. The two vessels were now approaching each other, but at an angle : the Centaur moving south-southeast, on a tack, and the brig sailing southwestward, with the wind in her favor. In half an hour the Centaur was directly west of the brig, which was now in the passage and about four miles away. Tom and Ned, of course, were full of excitement ; they felt sure that the brig would be captured ; for if she kept her present course she would be intercepted, and if she turned back she would be forced to tack, in which case the Centaur could easily overhaul her.

Presently the brig did turn, but to the northwest, so that she still had the wind in her favor ; the Centaur at once came about and sailed directly north. Both vessels were heading straight for the Diamond Rock, and still nearing each other ; but the brig made two yards to the Centaur's one. And now the Frenchman edged a little farther north ; he was evidently making for the narrow passage between the Diamond and Martinique.

Boom ! Boom ! went two of the Centaur's guns ; but the balls splashed harmlessly a furlong short, and they were nearing the rock. Now the

brig was in the Diamond Passage ; as the wind was, the only course left for the Centaur was to pass on the leeward side of the rock. And then — the great rock took the wind out of the Centaur's sails ; she lay almost becalmed, while the saucy little brig sailed away in plain sight and almost within shot ; in half an hour she would be safe under the batteries of Fort-de-France.

"Drat it !" exclaimed Ralph, shaking his fist after the brig. "It is the fourth time the Frenchers have bamboozled us with that trick. I wish the bloomin' rock was in Jerusalem, I do ! There's the commodore a-heying of it an' sayin' some cuss words all to hisself ; *profane* swearing strickly forbidden by the harticles of war ; but mebbe the Hadmiralty 'd forgive 'im if he did rip out once or twiste. Bless his soul, I've known captings and leftenants to do it for less, not to say commo-dores !"

In fact, Commodore Hood was looking up at the rock very thoughtfully. Presently he called Lieutenant Maurice to his cabin, where the two had a long conference. That evening Tom was leaning against a gun and thinking rather bitterly of the day's experience, when the lieutenant accosted him.

"Tom," said he, "I am detailed for special service to-morrow, and I have asked the captain to let you and young Brown go with me. There's no danger, and I shall be by to keep you out of mischief. We leave the ship at sunrise, so look sharp !"

Of course, the boys were overjoyed. They had n't an idea what the service would be, and knew too much of naval discipline to ask ; but it promised change, and perhaps excitement, which was quite enough.

Early next morning a large boat was alongside, with twenty picked men besides the rowers ; Ralph was one of the number.

"What larks !" whispered Ned, as they seated themselves near the stern. "Wonder where we're going. I'll bet the lieutenant has orders to invade Martinique."

"I don't see many cutlasses," remarked Tom doubtfully. In fact, there were only three or four, and no muskets.

"Give way, lads !" ordered the lieutenant. Down crashed the oars, and the boat shot round the Centaur's bow, making directly for the Diamond Rock. The boys looked up at the grim precipices with a new interest and more wonder. The usual heavy surf was breaking on the eastern side of the rock ; on the west, where they approached it, the sea was almost smooth, but even here a landing would be difficult.

Lieutenant Maurice skirted the shore cautiously, looking for a safe place. At last they spied a sheltered nook between two masses of fallen rock. The bow of the boat was run in and secured with a line, and the men leaped ashore, followed by the lieutenant and the middies ; the boat's crew flung a word or two of sarcastic advice after their mates, and then pulled back to the Centaur.

"Now, my lads," said the lieutenant, "we're going to get to the top of this rock, if we can."

The men looked up and grinned. Above them the Diamond rose like a wall, jutting outward a little; even sailors cannot climb a smooth precipice.

"Of course we can't do it here," said Lieutenant Maurice; "we must push along the base to the slope."

"Ay, ay, sir!" responded the sailors cheerfully. There was a kind of narrow beach, littered with great sea-washed masses of rock; and the men, headed by Ralph, began to make their way along it, scrambling over the obstacles like so many cats; they looked upon the affair as a lark, and, of course, were in the best of humor. The officers followed rather more slowly, but the two middies were wild with delight. Sometimes they were wet with the spray that dashed against them; sometimes they had to crawl through clefts or along narrow shelves, with the towering Diamond on one side and the sea on the other; sometimes a great mass would bar their way, but a sailor would climb over the shoulders of another until his hands clutched some projection and he could draw himself up; his comrades would fling him a rope, and he would secure it above, the whole party swarming after, with a helping hand to the officers where it was needed. All the while they were laughing and shouting like schoolboys at play.

At length they came out on a gentle slope at

the northwest base of the Diamond ; it was thinly covered with grass tufts and scattered bushes.

"Up you go, lads!" shouted the lieutenant ; and the whole party raced up the slope until they came to a cliff, a hundred feet above the sea ; here they paused for breath.

There was an overhanging shelf about forty feet above them, so that the place where they stood was like a shallow cave ; it was clear that they could not pass over the cave. East of it the cliff was quite perpendicular and fifty feet high, but it was full of crevices, and several stunted Judas-trees were clinging to it by their long roots ; their way lay up this precipice, if anywhere.

"Can we do it, Ralph?" asked the lieutenant.

Ralph slowly rolled his quid in his cheek as he squinted at the precipice.

"'T ain't not to say easy walkin', yer honor ; but w'ere they 's a will they 's a way, as the bos'n's mate said w'en he flung hisself off the torp-gallant masthead. Anyways, here goes for this 'ere bloomin' precipuss ;" and kicking off his shoes he walked up to the rock at what he considered a promising point. It was as smooth as a wall just there ; but ten feet above a small tree stuck out over his head. These Judas-trees will grow even on bare rock if they can find anything to cling to ; they live on the air.

"Here, some o' you lubbers, give us a back, can't ye?"

A sturdy young sailor set his hands and head against the rock, and Ralph climbed to his shoul-

ders. "Hold fast!" he yelled, and gave a spring which sent his supporter howling into a cactus-bush; but Ralph had caught hold of the tree and was pulling himself up to it.

"All right, yer honor," he called, as he put his foot on the tree. "Up I goes now; but fust fling me a rope, somebody." They tossed him a coil of rope, and he secured it to the tree. "Better come up one at a time," he remarked; "this yer bloomin' tree's mostly rotten."

With that he began to work his way along the face of the cliff, clinging with fingers and toes and knees and shoulders; with his very hair and eyelids it seemed, for not even a cat could have followed him. Now he would pull himself up by a bush or a grass tuft, now clutch a projecting point and swing his great loose body over space until his feet touched some crevice, but going higher every moment. Long ere this the other sailors had swarmed up the rope and were after him. Tom and Ned were for following, but the lieutenant restrained them. "Wait," he said.

In a few minutes the sailors reached a ledge and made their way along it until they were directly over the cave. Ralph looked down and waved his hat.

"Seems easy goin' now, yer honor; want to come up here?"

"Not by your road!" laughed the lieutenant. "How are we to get there?"

"Easy 'nough, if ye can climb a rope; I'll let down a bit o' twine, an' if yer honor'll fasten it to

that there coil, we 'll draw it up an' give it a turn round this tree."

"All right," answered the lieutenant. The men had left several coils of rope at the foot of the cliff, and one of these was soon drawn up. The lieutenant and the two boys ascended it easily enough; to climb a rope is nothing to one who has a nautical training. They found themselves upon a ledge about four feet broad; above it the rock was as steep as a roof, but with crevices and bushes which would assist in climbing. Two coils of rope were brought up; they might need them farther on.

"Up we goes again!" called Ralph; and up they went, clinging to rocks and bushes and grass — anything that would bear. Lieutenant Maurice cautioned the boys to test every hold before trusting their weight on it, and he knew that their training in the Centaur's rigging would keep them from dizziness; in fact, both Tom and Ned could climb almost as well as the sailors, and they looked upon the scramble as glorious fun, chattering all the while like magpies. The lieutenant advised them to save their breath.

In thirty minutes they reached a wide platform or terrace, about halfway up the rock; but here the way seemed effectually barred. There was another cave and overhanging shelf, thirty feet high, and on each side a sheer precipice, right down to the sea; only sailors could look over without turning dizzy.

The lieutenant shook his head. "You've done well, lads," he said, "but you can't accomplish

impossibilities; we shall have to go back. Perhaps to-morrow the carpenter can fix a ladder for us, and if we can get it up here we can climb over the roof of the cave."

"Axin' yer honor's parding," said Ralph, "I thinks we can do it to-day. I ain't no faith in these yer wooden ladders; they ain't proper gear for sailor-men. Now there's that there tree; if we cud on'y get a rope over it, the thing 'ud be done, as the sayin' is. I goes for tryin' the tree."

The lieutenant looked. The tree was clinging to the rock, three hundred feet and more over the boiling surf below; it was thirty feet above them, and ten feet out over the precipice. No mortal man could climb to it.

"If yer honor don't mind," repeated Ralph, "I goes for tryin' the tree."

"Are you crazy, man? How could you get to the tree?"

"Nothen like tryin', yer honor," returned Ralph. "I wants a good long bit o' cord."

Tom dove excitedly into his breeches pockets and pulled out a stout fishline; some of the men had rolls of cord, and Ralph knotted them together until he had a length of a hundred feet or more. Then he tied a stone to one end. Pausing a moment to reflect, he drew out his knife and cut the cord almost through, about a yard from the stone. Finally he coiled the line carefully, and separated the coil into two unequal portions; the larger portion, which had the stone attached to it, he held in his own hand; the smaller portion he

passed to another sailor, warning him to keep a firm hold on it. Tom watched with breathless interest. He understood that Ralph intended to fling the stone over the tree, and that the portion of cord held by him was for slack; but he could not see how the manœuvre would aid them.

"Here goes for a toss!" remarked Ralph. Stepping back a little from the edge of the precipice, he gave the stone a fling, letting the cord go with it. The stone fell short and rattled down the side of the precipice; but they quickly drew it in again, and Ralph made another cast. This time the cord fell over one of the smaller branches of the tree, and the stone remained hanging.

"'T won't do," muttered Ralph; "branch ain't strong enough." With that he gave the cord a jerk, and the stone rattled down as before. Three or four successive trials failed.

Ralph took off his hat and scratched his head. "Yer honor," said he, "I can climb as well as most sailor-men, but I can't toss wuth a farden, an' that's the truth. Now mebbe some o' my mates could do it."

"Oh, please," cried Tom, "I'm a cricket player; I'm sure I could put the stone where Ralph wants it."

The lieutenant nodded, and Ralph passed the cord to Tom. "Rec'lect, sir," he said, "you must let th' cord go long o' th' stone; I wants it over th' trunk o' th' tree, as clost to the roots as you can get it."

Tom bared his arm, measured the distance with

his eye, and gave a strong fling. The stone went over the tree-trunk, but swung round and round it, making the cord fast.

"'Tain't no use so," said Ralph; "we can't climb a string." With that he gave the cord a strong, quick pull; of course it broke where Ralph had cut it, and he lost only a foot or two of cord. Pulling it in, he attached another stone, taking care to "wound" the cord as before. "Give it a leetle more slack, sir," he advised, as he handed the coil to Tom again.

Tom flung it, and this time the cord fell directly over the strongest part of the tree; the stone made it swing like a pendulum, but it did not tangle. Ralph took the remainder of the cord and jerked it a little; the weight of the stone caused it to slide over the tree until the stone itself was a little below them, but ten or twelve feet out over the precipice.

"Thankee, sir," said Ralph; "that's all right so fur. Now we got to get hold o' th' stone. I wisht we had a boat-hook. Look for a branch, mates."

The sailors searched down the slope, but the stunted bushes were all too short. Ralph scratched his head again, looking thoughtfully at the swinging stone.

"I fancy," said Lieutenant Maurice, "that if you fling another stone and cord at it, the two cords will tangle; then you can draw the stone in."

Ralph slapped his leg. "Just the thing, yer honor!" he said. They still had ten or twelve

yards of the cord in their hands, and Ralph was about to tie another stone to it.

"Wait a minute," called Ned; "here's a bush all covered with fish-hooks; it would be a jolly thing to tangle. Why not tie half a dozen branches of it to the cord? It is n't a long fling."

The suggestion was an excellent one; the bush was one of those stunted acacias, common in such dry places, where they develop enormous branched spines. With some difficulty and many scratched fingers, a number of these were cut off and fastened in a bunch to the cord. Tom held the cord just above this bunch, and drew up a coil for slack; Ralph holding the remainder of the cord and looking on anxiously.

"Keep a little farther back, Tom," said his cousin.

"Better have a turn o' rope round 'im," suggested Ralph. Tom affected to pooh-pooh the danger, but in reality was glad to feel the rope, because he had to stand close to the dizzy edge, and tossing a bundle of thorns is awkward work.

"Now, sir!" said Ralph. Tom swung the bundle gently outward and let it go. It hit the swinging cord, caught it in twenty hooked fingers, and held fast.

"Hoo-ray!" shouted Ralph. Then he pulled in the cord, untied the thorns and the stone, and tossed them over into the surf. Everybody was intensely interested; as for Tom and Ned, they felt that they had distinguished themselves, and were in the seventh heaven of delight.

Ralph now had a running line over the tree, like that of a flagstaff. Measuring off a hundred feet or more of rope, he untwisted one end, trimmed it carefully, and secured it to the cord, binding them together for a foot or more. "I trimmed th' rope so's to keep it from foul'n'," he explained. "If th' cord'll hold, we can get th' rope over th' tree right enough."

"Pull gently!" ordered the lieutenant; "we don't want the job spoiled."

Ralph took the free end of the cord and began to pull the rope up; it passed safely over the tree, and in five minutes they had the end down again. Both ends of the rope were now secured firmly to a projecting rock, and the ladder was complete; but it was a terrible one.

"Test it first," ordered the lieutenant; "I can't risk the lives of my men. Four of you pull on it together."

Four stout sailors grasped the rope and pulled. The tree swayed and trembled, but it held firm.

"Now, yer honor," said Ralph, "I inwented this 'ere rope ladder, and I claims the right to try it fust. I'd like to take th' cord with me; if so be as I can work along to som'eres above here, mebbe we can dewise an easier road for my mates."

"Go ahead, Ralph!" said the lieutenant; "but have a care of yourself. We can't afford to lose you."

"All right, yer honor," responded Ralph. "'Tain't nothen now; it's as safe as the main-mast o' the Centaur."

Pausing a moment, he grasped the rope and went up like a spider ; Tom held his breath to see the man dangling over that awful gulf. But he was in the tree in a minute, and looking upward. A bush gave him hold until he could reach another tree ; a projecting rock took him higher ; then he worked his way horizontally until he was directly above them and had found good footing on a ledge. With one accord the men pulled off their hats and gave him a rousing cheer ; Tom and Ned fairly danced in the excess of their joy.

Ralph waved his hat in return, and then called out, "How much rope ye got left?"

"About fifteen fathoms," answered the lieutenant.

"That'll do, yer honor. Ketch this 'ere line, somebody," and he flung down the end of the cord. The men secured it to the rope, and Ralph drew the rope up, making it fast to a tree. Then the whole party swarmed up the rope, — a very much safer affair than the other, — and shook hands with Ralph on the ledge.

After that the way was easy. At eleven o'clock they stood on the flat summit of the rock, cheering and waving their hats to the Centaur, which looked wonderfully small below them ; the men on the Centaur waved in return, and they could see Commodore Hood on the quarter-deck taking off his hat to them. Tom knew that the ship was hot and uncomfortable at this hour, but up here it was cool and breezy, and the view was

worth all it had cost them : the Martinique mountains rising tier beyond tier, St. Lucia more distant, and a vast expanse of blue water. Presently Lieutenant Maurice produced a little English flag and fastened it to a stick on the very highest point. The bunting flew out bravely, there were more cheers, and the Centaur dipped her ensign ; altogether it was quite an exchange of congratulations between the ship and the rock.

"It's jolly here, and no mistake," whispered Ned, "but I wonder if we came up just to set the flag. Won't the Frenchies be mad when they see it, though ! And they won't get it down in a hurry, neither, not if we take the ropes away." But Tom observed that the ropes were left where they had been fixed, and he surmised that other excursions to the rock were contemplated ; perhaps the commodore wished to exercise the men on shore.

With ropes over the worst points, they descended easily enough, and by one o'clock were alongside the Centaur again. Commodore Hood met them at the gangway and grasped the lieutenant's hand. "Mr. Maurice," he said, "you have done well !"

"The credit is due to the men, sir," answered the lieutenant, modestly. "Ralph Dempsey, especially, accomplished wonders, and really risked his life. The midshipmen were useful, too ; in fact, every one behaved well."

"Of course ; they're British sailors. I thank you all, lads. Mr. Gray, see that these men have

double allowance for two weeks ; and book Dempsey for promotion."

The men broke into a cheer ; Sir Samuel lifted his hat with stately courtesy. "Mr. Maurice," he said, "you will be glad to refresh yourself. Come to my cabin in an hour."

V

HIS MAJESTY'S SLOOP

THAT afternoon there was another long conference in the cabin ; and on the following morning Lieutenant Maurice led a strong party to the rock, including the men who had already climbed it and twenty more. They carried provisions for two days, heavy blocks and tackling and an immense coil of harpoon-line. Much to their chagrin, Tom and Ned were not included in the party. However, as it turned out, they had plenty to interest them on board. During the afternoon watch the *Centaur* was moved close up to the *Diamond*, on the south side of the rock, where it formed a sheer precipice from top to bottom ; this place was sheltered from the surf by a projecting reef, and Tom learned that a boat had been engaged in sounding it while they were on the *Diamond*. They found excellent anchorage close to the precipice ; but, not content with this, the commodore ordered the ship to be warped up with kedges until it almost touched the rock.

Interest was now at white heat, but nobody could divine what the commodore was trying to do. One suggested that the men on the rock were going to let down a supply of fresh water,

but Tom objected that they had found no water there. Another surmised firewood for the cook, which was hardly more satisfactory. On the whole, the ship's company had to resign itself to waiting.

About noon faint halloos were heard above, and presently the long harpoon-line came dangling down the face of the precipice. The sailors brought the end on board and attached it to a coil of inch rope; then the party above began to pull the rope up; not an easy job as it grew longer, but it was accomplished in an hour or two. General opinion now was that something was to be drawn up by means of the rope; but what?

The coil of rope ran down a hatchway, and everybody was watching it. Presently, fastened to the rope, came a great "stream hawser" — a four-inch cable. It ascended slowly, for the weight, added to that of the rope, was very great and constantly increasing as the cable was uncoiled.

"Blessed if his honor been't a-goin' to throw out a hanchor from the bloomin' rock, so 's to keep it from driftin' away," remarked a sailor.

"'Vast heavin', ye lubber!" said another, "don't ye see it's the ship wot's a-goin' to be hanchored to the rock?"

Whatever his object was, the commodore was in earnest about it; he sent a reinforcement to the rock, with stronger tackling; but even so aided, it was a whole day before they had the end of the cable fast on top. Meanwhile the ship's blacksmith was busy making a great iron ring, or rather pipe, a foot in length and very strong;

this was passed over the cable, on which it slid easily.

"Tom," said the mystified Ned, "what is the commodore driving at? The thing is like the 'travelers' that we used to send up our kite strings. It would be lovely to send an iron traveler up the cable; but I don't see how it can be done."

"They'll pull it up," suggested Tom. "Don't you see the tackling?" In fact, two strong ropes had been run from the ship to the top of the rock and back again, and double blocks were fixed on them. A sailor climbed the cable to the height of the Centaur's mainmast, and fixed a tackle there.

"Mates," said a gunner solemnly, "I 'ave struck the bottom o' this 'ere myst'ry. Wot his honor's a-goin' to do, he's a-goin' to haul the bloomin' ship up an' set her on top o' the rock. Now you mark my words, it's wot the commodore's got in mind; an' he'll do it, too, if any man can."

"Wot'll we do up there?" asked a marine.

"Never you mind. Sojers, they don't know nothen about sech things. If the ship goes up, you goes inside, don't you? Jest you obey orders, and then you'll see."

Whether this extreme view would have gained adherents may be doubted. However, it was pretty clear that something was to be drawn up by means of the tackling and the iron "traveler." The Centaur was moved a little away from the

rock, stretching the cable as taut as a stay rope ; it now extended from the Diamond to the Centaur at an angle of forty-five degrees. Finally, an eighteen-pounder cannon was rolled up and secured to the "traveler" with a dozen turns of rope ; all the tackles were attached to it, the gun itself was unfastened from its carriage, and a hundred and fifty men began to haul on the ropes, one of which was attached to the great windlass.

For the first time the crew saw Commodore Hood's object : he meant to fortify the rock and so secure command of the passage north of it. The excitement was intense. Tom and Ned never doubted that the feat would be accomplished ; but some of the officers shook their heads.

The ropes stretched and groaned and cracked ; the cable, taut as it was, bent sharply to the pressure. But after a moment the great gun stirred, and then was lifted from its carriage, and then hung free, moving upward, inch by inch. Officers and crew pulled off their hats and cheered until they were hoarse ; all but the men at the ropes, who only grinned and kept up their "yo-heave-yo" steadily. Fresh relays relieved them ; after a while another tackling was fixed, higher up the cable, for the men now climbed it in swarms, and one even slid down from the rock to the Centaur's deck.

At night the gun was left suspended in mid-air ; but work was resumed in the morning, and by the close of another day they had their first eighteen-pounder on top of the rock. Tom had

commenced a glowing letter to his mother, in which he described the various operations with a vast amount of detail and numerous exclamation points; a very interesting letter, and I wish I could transcribe it. But really, I have no space to tell of all the feats that were performed on that cable bridge. They dragged up two eighteen- and three twenty-four-pounders, and their carriages, and ammunition, and water, and a hundred other things. The men seemed to vie with one another in seeking the posts of greatest apparent danger; often a dozen would be working on the cable, five hundred feet up, fixing blocks, keeping the traveler and its load from fouling, and doing such feats of climbing as would seem a miracle to landsmen.

Then, a great part of what had been pulled up the precipice had to be lowered to various points on the accessible side of the rock; that is, on the northern side. One twenty-four-pounder formed the "Queen's Battery," at the very base, with a rotating carriage; thus it could command in turn one of the two possible landing-places, or the northern channel, or the sea eastward. Another twenty-four, the "Centaur Battery," was at the top of the lower slope, sweeping it, as well as the other landing. "Hood's Battery," formed of the third twenty-four, was on the flat space near the middle of the rock, just below the cliff which Ralph had scaled with so much glory. The two eighteen-pounders were mounted on top of the rock, and here also a flag had been erected.

Spaces were leveled off around the guns, and low parapets were built ; steps were cut or blasted out to facilitate the ascent, and rope ladders were fixed at the worst points.

All this occupied many weeks : meanwhile, a hundred or more men were constantly on the Diamond, under command of Lieutenant Maurice ; and every one regarded this " shore duty " as a privilege. At first the sailors swung their hammocks in the shallow caves that have been described, and cooked their rations over open fires, picnic fashion ; but after a while a large building was begun, to serve as barracks and officers' quarters. This building, called the " Stone House," was at the top of the lower slope, in front of the cave where Lieutenant Maurice's party had stopped to rest during their first ascent ; its walls were built of stone blasted from the Diamond itself, and lime was brought from St. Lucia for cement. The cave was occupied by a blacksmith's forge and the cook's galley.

Of course, the sailors explored every accessible spot on the Diamond, cutting paths here and there, and waging relentless war on the unfortunate snakes and lizards. In two places they found water trickling over the precipices, but it was brackish and unfit for drinking ; so all their water, as well as provisions, had to be brought from the Centaur. A cistern was planned, but unfortunately — as the sequel proved — was never completed.

Meanwhile, the French on the Martinique shore

watched the rock with wonder, and at first with laughter; what could the English do there? When they saw great guns actually mounted in battery they began to look grave. Now and then small vessels hovered near, flying to shelter if any of the blockading ships approached them; for at times three or four British vessels of Commodore Hood's squadron were lying near the Centaur. After a while canoes ventured over from the Martinique shores with cargoes of fish, fruit, and vegetables to sell; and this trade, though really contraband, was tacitly permitted by both sides. Tom, who was allowed to spend much of his time on the Diamond, used to practice French with the boatmen; but their talk was very puzzling at first, because they used so many strange terms and clipped words. It seemed wonderful to the boy that he could be only a mile from a hostile country, and yet so safe.

Commodore Hood was on the rock almost every day, and he took the keenest interest in the work, often superintending it himself. On the queen's birthday he gave a breakfast there to all the officers who could be spared. Finally he ascended to the top, where a hundred sailors were gathered, with twenty marines; here he made a little speech.

"My lads," said he, "you have done your work nobly, and England will be proud of you. This spot is a conquest of the British Navy; and the British Navy, with God's help, can keep it. But you know that the navy only includes vessels

of war. What then? Shall we give up the Diamond to a garrison from the army?"

Cries of "No! No!"

"We are sailor-men, and proud of it; the Admiralty commands only vessels and sailors. Well, then, I'll tell you what we will do. We will call this rock a vessel, and then it can remain in the navy, where it belongs. I now declare that we have taken it as a lawful prize; and I put it in commission as His Majesty's sloop-of-war Diamond Rock, with Mr. Maurice in command, and you, lads, to hold it for the King and England. Up with your flag, Captain Maurice!" The red bunting flew out, the men cheered, and boom on boom came the guns of the Centaur and two frigates in a naval salute, as the commodore shook hands with the new commander. "Ralph," he added, "I have asked that you be appointed chief gunner of the Queen's Battery."

Ralph pulled off his hat, with a very red face; the other sailors cheered again and pushed him forward. "Find your tongue, man," whispered one; "his honor's waitin' for hacknowledgments and thanks, don't ye see?"

"Fire away, Ralph," said the commodore good-naturedly; "this is a day for talking, you know."

Ralph pulled his long body into a very erect posture, stammered, turned to eject a quid of tobacco, and delivered himself as follows:—

"Your honor and mates, I ain't no hand at speechifyin'. If so be as I'm gunner of the battery, I'll try to do my duty haccordin'. Me and my

mates, we done what we could, but 't ain't wuth speakin' of. And don't you make no mistake about it; 't ain't nothen to what we'd do for his honor. If his honor says this 'ere hisland 's a sloop, then a sloop it is, because no man ain't a-goin' for to deny it. Likewise, if he horders us to hup hanchor and sail away to old England, I'm agreeable. But what I says is, I've shipped on a many rum wessels, but this 'ere's a long ways the rum-mest o' the lot. Nortwithstanding of which, I maintains positive as it's a sloop. Because" (defiantly) "nobody shan't conterdict his honor, not if he says a marlin-spike's a church horgan. And I calls for three cheers for Sir Samuel Hood, the best commodore in the navy, and blast the rest, and the on'y one what ever captered a bloomin' mounting and set it afloat; and three more for Leftenant Maurice, the capting o' this 'ere stun sloop-o'-war; — Hip! Hip!"

Believe me, those cheers were given with a will.

VI

THE FLAGS

THE advantages arising from the occupation of the Diamond Rock were at once apparent. The effectual blockade of the passage was secured by it ; the French no longer dared to pass inside the rock, for the narrow channel was now swept by British guns. The lofty summit was a magnificent lookout and signal-station ; incoming vessels could be sighted far on the horizon, and their rig and character determined, long before they could be made out from the Centaur. Moreover, the coasting trade of Martinique was almost entirely stopped. Then, as now, the plantations along the eastern side of the island depended on little sailing vessels for the transportation of their produce to Fort-de-France or Saint-Pierre. As these vessels crept along the shore they were stopped by the Diamond batteries ; and if they ran outside they were exposed to almost certain capture by the blockading vessels. On dark nights they sometimes attempted to slip by the rock ; but it was dangerous business, and not a few were taken. In fact, the "stone sloop" was a complete success. To the French it was an insult as well as an aggravation. The British were so strongly posted,

and so watchful, that it seemed impossible to dislodge them ; but their enemies were vigilant, too. Sometimes boats from Fort-de-France ventured quite close to the rock to reconnoitre.

By Lieutenant Maurice's request, Tom and Ned had been detailed to spend six months on the "sloop Diamond Rock ;" in a small way, the boys could now make themselves useful, running about with messages, superintending jobs, and so on. Of course, they were delighted, and wrote glowing letters home. But by this time all England knew how Commodore Hood had impressed a rock for the British Navy. It was regularly entered on the admiralty books as a sloop-of-war ; Nelson himself was much interested in the odd experiment, and the newspapers were full of it. There was even a good-natured caricature of the commodore, seated astride of the Diamond, with cannon for spurs.

As far as possible, life on the rock was regulated as on a real war vessel : there were watches, timed by bells, musters, gun-drill, and so on. Everything had a nautical flavor, from the "cook's galley" and "forecastle" to the "Jacob's ladders," as the rope stairways were called, and the "maintop" for the summit of the rock. Landing on the rock was "coming aboard."

Lieutenant Maurice worked unceasingly to prepare his crew for any emergency. More than once the boys were routed out at dead of night by the call, "All hands repel boarders !" and in the gloom they and the sailors had to clamber about

those break-neck paths and man the batteries. This was exciting while it lasted, for no one could tell that the attack was not a real one. As for Tom, if the truth must be told, he was often desperately afraid: there was something so terrible in the uncertainty, where darkness might conceal a thousand men and the silence be broken by a volley of musketry. But if he was afraid he was too proud to show it, and he never hesitated in his duty; which was the best heroism. In the morning he would be very brave again, and long for some opportunity to distinguish himself. Tom felt that his life was wasted; he had been almost a year in the navy without a single chance of showing his valor.

Lieutenant Maurice — or Captain Maurice, as he was now called by courtesy — had a hobby. This was a system of “telegraphing” by waving flags; something like the “wigwag” system of our day, though, in comparison, very crude and clumsy. In 1804 ships could signal each other with strings of flags, each flag meaning a word or a number corresponding to a sentence in the signal-book; but “wigwagging,” or signaling by the motions of a single flag, was still in its infancy; in fact, the few attempts in that direction had been abandoned, at least in the navy. Captain Maurice had invented a system of his own. It was very complicated, involving different motions of a red flag for each letter; but he believed in it enthusiastically, and was hoping to put it into actual use. By way of experiment, he taught it

to the midshipmen of the Centaur and Diamond, and Tom and Ned soon became expert "wig-waggers." In fact, they liked it so much that they used to practice it, hour after hour, for their own edification. Sometimes, when one was on the Centaur and the other on the Diamond, they could talk at considerable distances, using small telescopes which Captain Maurice had given them.

Now, as they were boon companions and generally had some scheme on foot, they found it convenient to have a private system. So they agreed that certain words, spelled out by Captain Maurice's code, should mean something quite different. For example, if Ned wigwagged "going to dinner," Tom would read it "look out for fun in the dog-watch;" and so on. Concocting mischief at a distance of two or three miles had its fascinations, as any youngster will understand; there was such a glorious sense of mysterious villainy, and all the more because they had not initiated the other midshipmen. They could recognize each other, even at a distance, by a sign which had been agreed upon, — two diagonal strokes.

Of this, more anon.

VII

THE FORTUNES OF WAR

ONE day Tom was sent to the Centaur with some papers, and was detained there until after night-fall ; however, the sea was smooth and he did not apprehend any danger. It was nearly ten o'clock, and very dark, as he descended the ship's side ; his boat contained six sailors, besides Ralph, who had come off on leave. Tom himself, as commanding officer, took the tiller.

Now, whether from the darkness or an unknown current, the boat got a little off its track, approaching the Martinique shore. Warned by Ralph, Tom was about to shift the rudder, when they saw something moving nearer the beach ; a faint, pale blur, just visible against the dark hills beyond. At a word from him the men stopped rowing and listened attentively. "Can you make it out, Ralph?" he whispered.

"'Pears like a sloop, sir ; one o' they French coasters, sneakin' past the Diamond."

Tom's heart gave a great leap ; here was the coveted opportunity for glory : to capture a vessel ! What would Ned say, and his cousin, and the commodore ! To be sure, he was not cruising for prizes, and had no orders to take this coaster,

if it was one ; but, at least, he had no order to the contrary ; and he knew that, had the sloop been noticed from the Diamond, a party would have been sent to intercept it. It was a sudden emergency ; if he went to the rock or to the Centaur for instructions the sloop might escape.

“Ralph,” he whispered excitedly, “shall we board her?”

Ralph hesitated. If Tom had been absent he would have attacked the sloop at once ; but he feared that the boy might get into trouble if he acted without orders. “In course,” he said at length, “you commands ’ere, sir, an’ the thing do look safe. But we don’t know nothen ’bout that there sloop. My advice is, be keerful.”

“Anyway, we can reconnoitre,” said Tom. “Pull ahead softly, lads !”

In two minutes they were close alongside the sloop. A man appeared at the side and hailed them in French.

“What vessel is that ?” called Tom in the same language.

“The Jeannette, to Fort-de-France with sugar.”

“How many men?”

“Three, and a boy. Mon Dieu ! Are you English ? We wish you no harm ; let us pass.”

“Pull, lads !” yelled Tom, carried away by excitement.

“The saints protect us ! it’s a man-of-war’s boat ! Keep off !” cried the captain ; but Ralph and four others were over the side, and Tom after them. The Frenchman wrung his hands and

swore and begged alternately, Ralph standing over him and brandishing a cutlass. "Mercy!" screamed the captain in French. "Spare my life, good man; it is true that I love the English!" Ralph grinned and pointed to Tom, who summoned up all his dignity and as much French as his excitement had left him.

"Monsieur," he said pompously, "je — je demande — surrender — la reddition, you know — de votre chaloupe — au nom du roi d'Angleterre."

"Mais, monsieur," protested the horrified Frenchman, "it is impossible! I cannot — I really *cannot* — surrender to a child! Think of the shame!"

"Monsieur," returned Tom freezingly, "it suffices that I am an officer; my age does not concern you."

In point of fact, the formality was quite unnecessary, because Tom's party was already in possession; the frightened negro crew had not even hinted at resistance; Ralph's mates had already shifted the helm and trimmed the sail. It was clear that Tom had captured the Jeannette, and already visions of prize-money began to dance through his brain.

But here a difficulty arose. They were now well to leeward, both of the Diamond and of the Centaur, with the wind very light. A couple of tacks left them almost where they had captured the sloop; and then, to make matters worse, the breeze died out entirely. The men tried towing with their boat, but it was slow work.



“SHALL WE BOARD HER?”

Suddenly they heard the dip of oars to the west, and a voice hailed them in French. Before they could prevent it, the captain of the *Jeannette*, who had been sitting sullenly on the cuddy, sprang up and yelled for aid.

"En avant !" came the response. Ralph seized their one musket and fired into the gloom, but on the instant a long boat, full of French sailors and soldiers, dashed up. There was a confused struggle, in which Tom took part without much knowing what he did ; Ralph tried to force him into the English boat and cast it off ; and then something struck the boy on the head, and he lost consciousness.

Tom was only stunned. When he recovered, a few minutes later, he was lying on a hard floor or deck, in total darkness. Close by he could hear the lap of the sea against the vessel's side ; and a smothered curse came from some one near him. His head ached woefully.

"Master Tom, sir, be that you?" came Ralph's voice.

"Oh, Ralph ! Where are we?"

"Took prisoners by them bloody Frenchers, wuss luck ! an' locked up inside the cuddy o' this blarsted sloop, like pigs in a box. The rascalions triced me up in about forty fathom of rope, so I can't get at ye noways ; but glad I am to larn that ye 're not dead. Master Tom, sir," he continued, almost sobbing, "if so be as you been't too much hurt to forgive a willain, I axes

yer parding umble for gettin' you into this 'ere scrape."

"Ralph, you did n't! you warned me. And how could we know of the French boat?"

"We could n't, sir; leastways I might 'a' kept a lookout if I had n't been a thunderin' marine. Which I axes your parding again."

"Don't, Ralph! I should beg pardon of you and the other men. Are they here?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came stifled voices. "Hope ye been't much hurt, sir," added one.

"Only a rap on my head; and you?"

"Jimmy Rinks, he be wounded in the leg with a cutlash, but not bad, he says."

"Silence, there!" called a rough voice in French from the deck.

"Ralph," whispered Tom, "I'm not tied; I'll crawl over and release you."

"'T won't do much good; but I'd be thankful if you could ease this 'ere rope over my neck; I think my windpipe's busted."

Tom crawled over the prostrate forms, and after half an hour's work managed to relieve them from the worst of their bonds. The breeze had sprung up again, and they could hear the sloop moving through the water and men busy above. "Where are they taking us, Ralph?" whispered Tom.

"Dunno, sir. That last lot was man-o'-war's men, blarst 'em! They must 'a' been thirty of 'em, an' sojers and all. I give one a lick afore they downed me."

"I knocked one lubber overboard, but they pulled 'im in," growled another. It was small comfort, but all they had. Tom leaned back against the cuddy ladder, and pressed his aching head, and tried to think. Where now were his dreams of glory and prize-money? It began to dawn upon him that war was a game with two sides.

He wondered if his cousin would blame him; he thought of his mother, — how she must have prayed for him that day, and how she would pray, with tears and anguish, when she heard of his capture. Then he prayed a little himself, and somehow felt comforted, though tears were rolling down his cheeks. But when he remembered his position — chief of the luckless party, though only a boy — he dried his eyes. There in the darkness the little midddy resolved to be brave and honest, even if a captive, and to do his best to uphold the honor of his flag.

The cuddy was hot and stifling. Tom called to the Frenchmen above, begging them to open the door; but they only swore and bade him be quiet. So the prisoners lay for four hours, whispering such comfort as they could to one another, and listening to every sound. At length they heard calls; then the sail was dropped and the companion door was opened, admitting a delicious breath of cool air. Men entered with lanterns and pulled them out roughly. The moon had risen, and Tom could see that they were alongside an armed corvette, which was anchored

under the guns of a fort ; he rightly guessed that they were in the harbor of Fort-de-France.

"Pass the prisoners aboard !" came an order in French ; and Tom and his companions were pushed up the side of the corvette.

"Do any of you speak French ?"

"I do, a little," said Tom, stepping forward. The officer, a hard-featured man, looked at him with a sneer.

"A boy ! Where do you come from, you and these men ?"

"We belong to the naval force stationed on the Diamond Rock. We captured the sloop as it was passing by the rock in the darkness ; and soon after we were surprised by a boat's crew — some of your men, I suppose."

"Who commands your party ?"

"I do, monsieur."

The Frenchman grinned sardonically. "So messieurs the English have the practice of sending out expeditions under boys, eh ?"

"No, monsieur ; I was passing from the Centaur to the Diamond, and encountered the sloop by accident."

"And got nabbed, eh ? It will teach you not to meddle with French vessels ! Eh bien : how many men are there on the Diamond ?"

Tom was silent.

"Are you struck dumb, *gamin* ?"

"Monsieur," said Tom, respectfully enough, "I have no right to give you information about our forces."

"Death and blood!" yelled the officer, and stepping up to Tom he struck him on the cheek with his open palm. Tom never blanched, nor did he attempt to strike back; but he looked straight at the brute, with scorn on every feature. Ralph, cursing and fuming, tried to fling off the men who were holding him, but was knocked down after a momentary struggle.

"Now, you young rascal, will you tell how many men and guns you have?"

"No, I will not!" cried Tom, with blazing eyes.

"So much the worse for you! Quartermaster, carry the prisoners to the caboose."

"Monsieur," said Tom, "I am an officer, and I protest against this treatment."

"A boy aristocrat! Ah, bah! we have abolished all that, we. You will fare as your men do, *mon gamin*."

So Tom and his companions were thrust into a dark place, littered with ropes and anchor chains. Ralph and the others were untied; Rinks had his wound dressed, after a manner, and some kind-hearted Frenchman brought them a jar of water and a cup; that was all. They had no bedding, and slept as they could on the dirty planks, which swarmed with cockroaches; luckily, there were two hawse-holes, which admitted plenty of air.

So they remained for three days. Coarse food was brought to them, and twice Tom was taken out to be interrogated by the French captain; but he would reveal nothing, and was remanded with threats and curses. It was the worst of their

misfortune that they had fallen into the hands of one of the greatest brutes in the French Navy. Some of the other officers, indeed, showed their indignation pretty freely, but they could do nothing. In after years Tom learned not to judge a chivalrous nation by this scoundrel.

VIII

THE CUTTING OUT

THE vessel was the *Curieux*, brig-corvette ; their prison was in the bow, and the only entrance to it was by a door in the bulkhead. To relieve the stifling heat, this door — perhaps contrary to the captain's orders — was left open, a sentinel pacing before it ; the door led to a larger room, used as a forecastle by the corvette's crew. Though the prisoners were not bound, they knew it would be useless to try to break out, unarmed as they were, with the forecastle full of men, and perhaps fifty more above ; besides, had they gained the deck they would have been no better off. So they whiled away the time as they could, trying to keep their courage up and talking much of the *Centaur* and the *Diamond*. Often Tom chatted with Ralph until after midnight ; for the sailors, accustomed to watches, made little difference between night and day. Ralph surmised that their friends would know where they were from the reports of the fruit-sellers.

One night they were sitting thus ; "one bell" had sounded for half past twelve, and everything was silent above ; the sentinel leaned drowsily on his musket in the doorway, and most of the crew

were cooling themselves on deck. Just then, through the hawse-holes, came a slow beat, as of oars pulling softly ; no doubt the prisoners caught the sound before it could have been heard on deck, because they were close to the surface of the water. Ralph crept to the side and listened. In a moment he caught Tom's shoulder and bent to, whisper in his ear :—

“Don't you speak, sir, and don't stir ! It's the Centaur's boats ; I knows the stroke in a thousand. Lord bless the bullies, it's a cuttin' out, I do believe ! Let on as you're asleep, sir ; if they's a shindy we wants to be in it, but not yet.”

Tom pressed the sailor's hand, his heart beating wildly. Then he heard Ralph step over his sleeping mates and walk to the water-jar, which was close to the door. The sentinel paid no attention to him.

“*Qui vive ?*” came a sharp voice from above ; then a pistol shot, hoarse cries in English and French, and the crash of a gun. The men in the forecastle sprang up the ladder ; the sentinel was just slamming the door to when Ralph's long arms gripped him as in a vise. “*À moi, camarades !*” he yelled ; but his voice was lost in the din, and on the instant Ralph's mates were at his side ; they had been awakened, of course, by the racket. Followed by Tom, they poured into the deserted forecastle ; the sentinel was thrust into the prison-pen and the door bolted on him ; and for the moment, at least, they were free. The forecastle

was dimly lighted by a swinging lantern ; above, the crash and combat continued.

" You commands agin, sir," said Ralph. " Shall we hop up the ladder an' take the mounseers behind? "

" See if we can find some arms first," said Tom, hurriedly ; he did n't feel a bit afraid now, but rather cool and elated. He had time for a gleam of vanity too : was he not about to lead a diversion in the rear of the enemy, and perhaps decide the battle?

One of the men picked up a cutlass, and Tom found another ; a third seized an axe which was slung against a bulkhead ; Ralph had the sentinel's musket, and the rest snatched anything that would serve as a club. Rinks was weak from his wound, and Tom ordered him to remain below.

Then, with a shout, they rushed up the ladder, Ralph first and Tom a close second. One instant he saw thirty or more Frenchmen struggling desperately with the English, who were pouring over the side ; then, somehow, they were in the fight, hacking, striking with clubs and fists, Ralph swinging the musket and felling a man at every stroke. Somebody rushed at Tom with a sword ; he parried as well as he could and struck back, and then —

A yell of victory ; shots from the French fort ; anchors slipped and sails run up by fifty eager men ; the corvette dropping down with the tide and wind, out of range in five minutes ; and warm hands pressing Tom's where he lay on a

hatch, with a sabre-cut in his shoulder — oh, so proud and happy !

They bound up the wound with a handkerchief, Ralph supporting the little midgy's head and alternately blubbing and cheering. Near by lay Lieutenant Reynolds, the gallant leader of the English, grievously wounded ; and a dozen others were more or less hurt. They told Tom that the attack on the Curieux had been talked of a week before, but only determined after Lieutenant Maurice had heard of their imprisonment from some fruit-sellers. "He begged to be allowed to lead, but you know that commanders can't leave their posts for such jobs. Indeed, we have all been so anxious about you that we could hardly wait for a dark night. As it was, the mounseers expected something and gave us a hot reception ; your rear attack came in the nick of time."

Here was balm for the wound !

They carried Tom to the Diamond, handling him as carefully as his mother could have done. His cousin almost sobbed with joy at sight of him, and Ned capered like a monkey, and altogether he had quite enough to satisfy even his own ideas of glory.

Then the surgeon came, and Tom bared his shoulder proudly, but winced a little under the examination. "It's no great matter," said the doctor cheerfully ; "you 'll be around in a fortnight, my boy, and will live to pay back this cut fifty times." At which Tom felt rather disappointed, for he was properly vain of his wound.

I am happy to say that the doctor's prediction was fulfilled, but, truth to tell, it was n't his skill that prevented Tom from being laid up for two months. It happened in this wise. On the day after the fight, Tom was feverish from loss of blood; up came the medical gentleman, felt his pulse, pulled a long face, and whipped out a keen little instrument called a lancet. "We must draw blood," said he, "to reduce the fever;" for that was the procedure of the time.

But it happened that Sir Samuel Hood had come off to the Diamond, and just then he entered the room where Tom lay. "Hullo, doctor," he called, "what are you doing with my boy?"

"I was just about to let a little blood, sir," answered the surgeon. "He has considerable fever, a condition in which phlebotomy is always indicated."

"Flea-thingumy be hanged!" returned Sir Samuel irreverently. "Let him alone, I tell you; he's young and healthy, and the cut will take care of itself."

"But, sir," remonstrated the surgeon, "I'm only following well-known rules; all the authorities recommend bleeding for fever."

"Sir!" thundered the commodore, "I don't care a rap for your authorities if they go against common sense. I've seen as many cuts as you ever did, man, and had them, too. The blood flows a bit, and fever follows, and you come along and make another hole to let out more blood; where's the sense of that?"

"But," — began the doctor again.

"No more, sir!" said the commodore sternly. "If you touch the lad with that thing I'll put you in irons; yes, sir, and keep you on bread and water for a week, and draw eight ounces of your blood every day to keep your spirits up." The surgeon retired, and Tom was better the very next day; which showed, I think, that the commodore was right.

Sir Samuel did more. He came and sat by Tom's bedside when the boy was better, and questioned him about his adventures. "I hope it was not very wrong, sir, taking the sloop as I did," said Tom anxiously. "I had no orders, but it seemed so safe, and we could n't know that a French boat was near. If it was a mistake, sir, I must be punished, of course. I reported the affair to Captain Maurice, and he referred me to you."

Now, in truth, his cousin had been hugely amused, and had already told the commodore of Tom's anxiety.

"So you took the responsibility?" queried Sir Samuel.

"Yes, sir," said Tom, "and I was the only one to blame; the men merely obeyed orders."

"Dear, dear!" said Sir Samuel quizzically; "here's a pretty tangle! Why, Ralph tells me that it was all his fault, and wants me to hang him to the yardarm as an example, because he let the French capture a midshipman."

"Indeed, indeed, sir, it's not so!" cried Tom earnestly. "Ralph cautioned me."

"On the whole, I think we may let that pass," said the commodore. "Besides," he added heartily, "it happens that I fully approve of your course. I don't, ordinarily, expect you boys to assume responsibilities, but I don't want you to shirk them either. And, Mr. Reeves, I have been informed how you answered that brute of a French captain, and I wish to say that you acted nobly, sir, and you and your men have my warmest thanks for the service you rendered the cutting-out party. I shall take care to mention it in my report."

Tom was blushing all over with pleasure by this time, but more was to come.

"Well," continued Sir Samuel, "you got into a scrape, and your cousin lost some sleep on your account; but you're all right now, and have your prize, after all."

"The prize, sir?" questioned Tom, mystified.

"Did n't you know it? Well, you see the sugar sloop was in English hands when the French boarded her and took you prisoners; so they had a lot of red tape over her in their prize court; and meanwhile the mounseers left her tied to the corvette — for fear she would run away, perhaps. Our men knew nothing about her until they had the corvette out of the bay; and there was the sloop, towing behind as fine as you please. Capital joke, was n't it? The cutting-out party declare that they will have nothing to do with her, because you and your party captured her first. It is n't quite regular, perhaps, but we don't want a

mutiny on the Centaur, so I suppose I must give in. The sugar in the sloop is worth a pretty penny."

So, in due time, Tom, with Ralph and the others, received a snug bit of prize-money; and Tom eventually spent nearly all his share at Barbados for a gorgeous brooch, which he sent home to his mother. It was n't a very artistic affair, but Madam Reeves wore it all her life and told everybody how it was obtained. As for the affair of the Curieux, it was much lauded: to "cut out" an enemy's vessel from under the protecting guns of a fort is justly regarded as a notable deed. You may see accounts of it in the English newspapers of that time, but not one as graphic as Tom's letter was. With it came a long letter from Captain Maurice, who was loud in his praises. "The boy is an honor to you and to us," he said.

IX

A CRUISE

VERY much to Tom's surprise, he was offered another share of prize-money, because he and the sailors with him had taken part in the capture of the *Curieux* itself. That vessel had been "bought in" for the British Navy, and in such cases the price was divided among the officers and men by whom the prize had been taken, according to their rank. But after consultation with Ralph and the others, Tom declared that they would take no part of the *Curieux* prize-money, since the cutting-out party had renounced its fair claim to the sugar sloop; and Captain Maurice said they were quite right. Strictly speaking, both corvette and sloop belonged to all the officers and men engaged; but a legal division might have caused endless bickerings. Mutual generosity made everything right, as it generally does; both parties were satisfied, and each was loud in its praises of the other.

The *Curieux* was a vessel of the build and rig known as "brig-corvette;" that is, she had two masts with square sails, and a "flush" deck extending from stem to stern, without any houses or other obstructions on it: this was the upper or

"spar-deck," used for sailing, and also the "gun-deck," with cannon at the sides. The French had armed the corvette with sixteen long six-pounders, but the English had replaced some of these with heavy carronades. About half were "traverse guns," capable of being moved from one side of the deck to the other, and hence available for both broadsides. Below the upper deck was a "berth-deck," divided by bulkheads into several rooms, and supposed to be used for sleeping and eating; but it was so hot and uncomfortable that both officers and crew preferred to sleep above when they could; rows of hammocks were slung at night along the sides of the upper deck, and clewed up or taken below in the daytime. The vessel was long and narrow, built especially for speed, and great things were expected of her.

Lieutenant Reynolds, the gallant officer who had led the cutting-out party, was appointed to the command; but as he was still disabled by his five severe wounds, the temporary command was given to his subordinate, Lieutenant Bettsworth. The corvette had been manned by a crew of one hundred seamen and twenty marines, mostly drafted from the Centaur; and when it was decided that she should start on a cruise, twenty-five additional men were shipped, to be used, when necessary, for prize crews. At the time of her capture the corvette had been all ready for sea, with three months' provisions on board.

All this had been arranged while Tom was recovering from his wound. He was quite well, and

was on the Diamond Rock with Ned, when they were informed by Captain Maurice that they had been detailed to go with the Curieux on her first cruise. "Bettesworth wanted a couple of midshipmen," said the captain, "and I recommended you. It will be a pleasant change for both of you, and it is well for you to become accustomed to small vessels." Captain Maurice gave them some good advice in a formal way, for he was never familiar with his middies. Of course, the boys were brimming over with excitement.

"May I ask where we are going, sir?" ventured Tom.

"No," said his cousin, smiling, "you may not ask. You should never seek information about the plans of your superiors. If it is right for you to know, they will tell you of their own accord;" and he dismissed them, after shaking hands with both.

Ned contained himself until they were safe in the "Queen's Battery;" there he executed a most prodigious hornpipe, shouting and throwing up his cap to the great edification of the sailors. "Wot's it all about?" asked one.

"Never you ask questions of your superior officer, young man, and then your superior officer won't tell tarradiddles," retorted Master Ned. "It's about a lark, and a cruise, and no end of fun; and we're coming back with a string of prizes, and glory? oh, no!"

"Beggin' my superyor ossifer's parding," said the sailor, touching his forelock with humility,

"we 'opes as 'ow 'e won't be diwested o' none o' them dancin' legs, 'count of a French cannon-ball goin' crooked. 'T would n't be noways nateral if you was to come aboard o' this 'ere sloop disguised in the hattitood of one o' them cherubims wot you sees on gravestones: th' kind as ain't got no lower decks to 'em."

"Reckon he 'd desearve to be spanked, all the same," growled another; "which he could n't be, 'cause cherubims don't have no conweniences for it."

"Mister Tom would n't, mebbe, be so bad," put in a third, shaking his head; "but passon, he says as it's hevil cormoonercations wot corrupts good manners; and passon, he knows!"

There was a laugh at this; the chaplain of the Centaur was popularly supposed to be rather easy in his morals.

The boys reported on the Curieux as they had been ordered, and that night the vessel tacked out into the open Atlantic. Tom and Ned were placed in separate watches, but of course they were often together during the day; generally they might be seen perched on one of the carronades, and the sailors dubbed this gun "the nursery."

The corvette soon proved herself to be a phenomenal sailor, so much so that the officers openly expressed their astonishment; she seemed to do equally well whether hauled up close to the wind or running free, and she was remarkably quick in manœuvring. Besides the ordinary lookouts, two men were stationed in the rigging. On the

second morning out they met another corvette, which proved to be a British dispatch-boat for Barbados; after exchanging signals, the two vessels continued on their respective ways. In the afternoon of the same day a schooner was sighted, but darkness came on before she could be overhauled, and no doubt she changed her course during the night, for nothing more was seen of her. The *Curieux* now headed for the north, sliding through the trade-wind "like a bloomin' greased pig," as a cockney sailor put it; the officers rubbed their hands and smiled when the day's run was announced.

But the real test came two or three days later. Early one morning a sail was observed on the northeastern horizon. Now this was almost directly to windward, and it soon appeared that the stranger was heading southward, or, what appeared more likely, south-southeast, towards Cayenne; so the *Curieux* turned east-southeast, which was as near the wind as she could sail to advantage. The lookout said that the stranger was a brig; at that distance they could not have seen her flag had she shown one.

At ten o'clock the two vessels were coming nearer to each other, but the brig, heading south-southeast, had the advantage of wind and was moving faster; so now she was southeast of the *Curieux*; she seemed to be paying no attention to her pursuer, and kept steadily on her course. At noon the *Curieux* was directly behind the brig, and she headed south-southeast after her: it was

a stern chase. At half past twelve the brig gave the first clear sign that she wanted to get away from the corvette ; she altered her course to south, and threw out studding sails. The Curieux was now on her best point of sailing, and that was saying a great deal ; the water slid past, smooth as oil, and the white wake seemed to stretch away for miles. But the stranger sailed well, too, and for a long time it was not clear that either was gaining.

A race of this kind is always exciting, far more so than an ordinary sailing match, because so much is at stake. The bow of the Curieux was crowded with watching sailors, and Tom and Ned were halfway up the rigging, chattering sixteen to the dozen. "Ain't she a darling, though!" commented Ned. "Sailing? oh, no! Look at that weed sliding past, will you! My eye, Tom, I never sailed so fast in my life!"

At three o'clock it was evident that the corvette was gaining ; she was now about six miles from the brig. At four the distance had been reduced, but night was approaching ; at half past four the brig was still five miles away. No one, of course, was certain that she was French ; if she was bound for Cayenne the route was an unusual one at that time, but it might have been chosen just because it was unusual, and therefore less likely to be watched.

Lieutenant Roberts, in charge of the deck, had been consulting with the captain ; at this moment he walked over to the wheel and gave an order ;

then he shouted "Stand by to trim sails!" and in three minutes the little craft was heading east-southeast, with a curling wake behind her; to all appearance the chase was given up.

The crew grumbled a little, but one old seaman advised them to "stow their jaw an' look out for orders." Now this ancient mariner was esteemed as a marine oracle; so the curious ones — Tom and Ned among them — watched for developments; but none came. At eight bells (eight o'clock in the evening) they were still moving east-southeastward, but had reefed the topsails. At midnight Ned met Tom as the watches were changing.

"Tom, darling," he whispered, "look at the compass." Tom knew, by the slant of the deck and the trim of the sails, that they were going free again; and when he sauntered past the binnacle he saw that they headed south-southwest. This puzzled him. The reefs had been shaken out.

Ned met him again at the end of the dog-watch. "Ninny! Don't you see?" he whispered. "Frenchy knew that we could n't catch him before night, and he was only waiting until then to scatter anywhere; west, maybe. But when we bore up he thought we'd had gumption to spot his game, and so had given him up as a bad job; most likely he just came back to his old course as soon as we were out of the way; so now he's going sou-southwest. But Captain Bettsworth knows a thing or two that Frenchy don't. When it's good and dark he winks to the lieutenant, and

the lieutenant winks to the wheel, and down we come again, pointing straight for the place where Frenchy 'll be in the morning. And every rag drawing, and all night to sail in. Oh, she's just swishing through it, I tell you ! And we're getting closer to that brig every minute. And our wind now. Tom, I 'll bet the brig's within gunshot at sunrise !"

At sunrise the brig was not quite within gunshot, but she was three miles distant on the lee-bow, and clearly at the mercy of the corvette. Seeing this, she kept to her course and showed English colors. The corvette immediately flew a French flag and fired a gun, not with the hope of hitting the brig, but as a signal to lie to. Down came the English flag, and the stars and stripes took its place; but the English sailors only grinned; in war-time no experienced officer is taken in by these stale flag tricks; the Curieux raised her true English colors and continued the chase. Captain Bettesworth had the guns cleared; to all appearance the brig was a merchantman, but he was not yet sure.

At seven o'clock the brig was clearly outsailed, and less than two miles distant. At half past nine the distance was reduced to half a mile, and the Curieux fired another shot. As the ball skimmed over the water the brig hauled down her American flag, and the French tricolor flew out; at the same time she came up into the wind, with her sails shivering, and waited. Five minutes later the Curieux was alongside, moving warily, with the

guns bristling from her ports ; but the French had no thought of resistance.

"What brig is that?" shouted Captain Bettesworth through his speaking-trumpet.

A man leaped to the rail of the brig, holding on by a shroud. "Brick français La Mignonne," he answered; "il n'y a personne qui parle anglais."

Captain Bettesworth looked puzzled. "Who's our best parly-voo?" he asked of a lieutenant.

"Well, sir, I think you can depend on Midshipman Reeves. I don't speak French very well, myself."

"Call Mr. Reeves, then," said the captain. Tom was standing ten paces away, and Captain Bettesworth winked at him whimsically, for he was no stickler on points of naval etiquette ; nevertheless he yielded to it so far, and summoned his midshipman as if that subordinate had been in the depths of the hold.

"Ain't we fine!" whispered Master Ned, pinching Tom's arm. Tom gave him a push and sprang forward, blushing. "The captain wishes to speak with you, Mr. Reeves," said the lieutenant, with another wink ; and Tom touched his cap.

"Mr. Reeves," said the captain, "hail that fellow ; find out what brig it is, where she's from, and where she's going. Here, take my trumpet."

Tom touched his cap again and proceeded to put the question in French ; he had some difficulty in managing the trumpet. "It's the brig

La Mignonne, from St. Domingo, for Cayenne," he translated.

"Tell him this is the British corvette Curieux, and she must surrender," said Captain Bettsworth.

"C'est la corvette de guerre anglaise le Curieux, et le capitaine dit que vous devez vous rendre," called Tom through the trumpet. It was n't very courtly French, but it served the purpose; the French captain wrung his hands tragically before he answered.

"He says he will surrender, sir," translated Tom in great elation; "and he says it's a peaceable vessel, and he is very unfortunate, and hopes you won't hurt him."

The crew of the Curieux were throwing up their caps and cheering. "Silence forward, there!" ordered the captain sternly. "Tell him to haul down his flag, and I will send a boat."

Tom repeated this, and the answer. "He says he awaits your pleasure, sir," he concluded, handing back the trumpet and saluting.

"Thank you, Mr. Reeves," said the captain. "May your share of the prize-money be as fine as your French was; the brig will bring in a good lump."

"Shall I tell him that, sir?" asked Tom, with roguish eyes; "he might like to hear it, you know."

"Get along, you young monkey!" laughed the captain. "You may dine with me if you'll behave yourself."

"Thank you, sir," cried the delighted Tom; and the next moment he was racing after Ned, who had saluted with mock reverence, and then butted him in the stomach.

Tom was called again directly, to go with the boat and act as interpreter if necessary. He lost some of his elation when he saw the misery of the French captain. This man had nothing to do with the war; he was an honest man, earning an honest living in an honest way, with no wish to harm his neighbors. Yet, because England and France were at each other's throats, his vessel had been seized, he had lost his position, and was, perhaps, ruined. No doubt it was a fine prize for the English, and taken in strict accordance with the laws of war. No doubt the *Curieux*, had she remained in French hands, would have captured English vessels just as pitilessly. But it was cruel.

Had the *Curieux* been short-handed and under a different commander, the French sailors might have suffered even more than their captain. For in those days men were often pressed into the navy; and when sailors were wanted badly, the officers were not very particular where they got them; many a Frenchman had been compelled to fight against his own country and flag, though the crime was always condoned by saying that he had no nationality, or was an English subject. But the *Curieux* had her full complement, and enough to spare for a prize crew which was to take the brig to Barbados. There she was duly condemned and sold for the benefit of the officers

and crew of the *Curieux* ; and I suppose that the captain recovered from his misfortune in time, as people do in this up-and-down world. When Tom left the brig the French sailors had been imprisoned in the hold, lest they should try to recover their vessel when the corvette was out of sight.

X

THE SANDERS

THE Curieux turned northward again, and for two weeks cruised about the French island of Guadeloupe. She met other English vessels of the blockading squadron, but for all that could be seen, the French flag had disappeared from those seas. Nothing could be done against Guadeloupe, as the shores were well protected by forts and batteries.

Guadeloupe is really composed of two islands, separated by a very narrow passage. The western part is high and mountainous; but the eastern island, called Grande-Terre, is comparatively low, with a long point stretching into the Atlantic and several inlets beyond the point. In 1804 these inlets were uninhabited. The largest of them is called Désirade.

One afternoon the Curieux was lying under the lee of Désirade, two miles southwest of it and about the same distance south of the point of Grande-Terre; the water here was quite smooth, because the islet protected it from the Atlantic rollers. The officer of the deck had been examining Désirade with his telescope, and he called Ned.

"Mr. Brown," he said, "I want you to take the cutter and half a dozen men and bring a few bags of sand from that beach ; there's no surf on this side, and you can get ashore easily. Leave at two bells (five o'clock) ; it will be cool then, and you will have plenty of time to get back before it is dark. Bring the cutter around now, and throw in some bags."

"Yes, sir," said Ned, touching his cap, while his eyes sparkled ; "I suppose the men should be armed ?" He knew perfectly well that it was a peaceful expedition, and that the sand was to be used for scouring or scattering on the decks ; armed boats are not put in charge of scatter-brained midshipmen. But Ned was n't going to miss excitement if he could help it.

"Nonsense !" laughed the lieutenant ; "there's nobody there, or only some fishermen, maybe. You can have a marine and his musket. And I'll give him orders to arrest you if you cut up," he added.

"All right, sir," answered Ned, as he touched his cap again ; but his eyes were still dancing. Two minutes after he was in deep consultation with Tom. The result was that when the boat lay alongside half a dozen muskets were smuggled into it through a port ; the sailors hid them under the sacks, quite willing to abet the boys in their mischief. As for Tom, he reasoned that the lieutenant had given no direct orders for the boat to go without arms. Ned did not reason at all ; he rarely did.

Little Jimmy Ryan, one of the powder-boys, or "powder-monkeys," as they were called, ran to the port with a shovel; "Oi 'm to give it to Misther Brown," he said; "an' bein' as he 's not here yit, oi 'll just sit on the shivel for fear 't would be shtolen," laying the tool in the bottom of the boat and coolly sitting down on top of it; he had a cutlass in his hand. The sailors laughed, and got between Jimmy and the stern when Ned descended to take the tiller lines; so that officer did not know of the powder-monkey's presence until the cutter was a hundred yards from the corvette; then Jimmy delivered the shovel with a grin. Ned laughed, and told Jimmy that he stood a chance of being ropes-ended for leaving the vessel without orders.

"So oi shall be, sorr," said Jimmy, "onless ye spake up for me." Ned laughed again; those two were kindred spirits.

The cutter pulled leisurely across to the beach, which was open and deserted; Tom, watching from the corvette, saw that the boat grounded quite a long distance from shore, so that Ned and the others had to wade; they left one man in her. In due time they put the sand on board, and then Ned strolled off to a higher part of the islet, while the sailors squatted about the beach. Tom lost sight of them in the gathering dusk.

"It's high time for that youngster to come back," growled the deck-officer; "no doubt he thinks it's mighty fine to be playing hooky, but he 'll be mastheaded if he don't look sharp."

Tom began to get anxious, and the muskets troubled his conscience a little. But there was no fort or frigate for Ned to attack with his seven men; being thus free from temptation, the chances were that he would return all right. The corvette already had a light out to guide him.

Six, seven, eight bells, and still no cutter; the lieutenant was stamping about the deck, scattering profuse maledictions on all midshipmen in general, and Ned in particular. "It's like his impudence, the monkey! If he stays much longer I'll have to send a boat after him. Serve him right if he was triced to the mizzen-shrouds all night, and the other young rattlepate with him."

Suddenly there was a flash to the north and a rattle of musketry, followed by two or three scattering shots and a faint sound as of shouting. Every one crowded to the rail and peered through the darkness, but they could see nothing.

Captain Bettsworth called from the quarter-deck, "What's that, Mr. Roberts?"

"Can't make out, sir," answered the lieutenant. "It was near the point; but there was no vessel in sight before dark. Midshipman Brown is off with a crew of sanders, but he went to Désirade. Besides, he had no muskets."

Tom was quaking in his shoes; he knew that Ned had muskets.

"Keep a sharp lookout, and be ready to take the wind; have a couple of men at the wheel. Call me if you hear anything more."

The captain went below, and for half an hour

Tom hung over the rail, peering northward. A light wind was blowing over Désirade; the corvette, lying to, had her head to the southeast.

"Sail to wind'ard!" called a lookout. The lieutenant was at the side in an instant, and sent Tom scurrying after Captain Bettesworth; but the captain had already leaped to the deck. "Douse that light!" he ordered sharply. "Camden, get the marines up on a jump. Train that carronade on the fellow. What is she, anyway?"

"Schooner, I think, sir," said Lieutenant Roberts, peering under his hand.

"Hail her, then."

"A-ho-oy!" shouted the lieutenant. "A-ho-oy!" the answer came, faintly.

"What schooner is that?"

"It's all right; it's me, sir," came the unsatisfactory and most ungrammatical response.

"Who the devil is me, then?"

"Midshipman Brown, you know. I've brought the sand, sir."

"The deuce you have! Did you charter the schooner to fetch it in?"

"No, sir; I captured the schooner. She's a daisy! There's thirty soldiers, and they're jolly seasick."

There was a ripple of laughter on the corvette. Captain Bettesworth took the speaking-trumpet.

"Come alongside, Mr. Brown. Was that your party firing?"

"Us and the soldiers, sir," answered Master

Ned, making another slash at grammar. "We've got two men wounded."

"Whew!" exclaimed the captain. Then he shouted again through the trumpet: "How many prisoners did you say?"

"Captain and thirty soldiers, sir; and the crew, but they're all blacks."

"That's nonsense, you know," remarked the lieutenant; "he had only six seamen and a marine, and how he got the muskets beats me."

"Let him come alongside," said the captain, laughing. "I judge he's done something brilliant, anyway."

Presently the schooner came up into the wind, thirty yards from the corvette, and stopped, with her sails shaking. Captain Bettesworth hailed her again. "Shall I send a boat?" he called.

"I think you'd better, sir," answered Ned; "and I should like a few marines. There's such a lot of prisoners, and I've only got five men able to do anything."

"I'll send a prize crew, and you can come back with your men. Bring your wounded and the French captain. Any French wounded?"

"No, sir; and our men are not badly hurt. It was before we boarded the schooner."

"Preserve us!" exclaimed Lieutenant Roberts; "then he boarded her with five men!"

"He's capable of it; but I think there must be a special guardian angel for midshipmen."

The prize crew was pulled across, and presently the boat returned. Ned clambered over the side,

followed by a very lean and very wrinkled man in the uniform of a French infantry captain ; Tom noticed that he had his sword. The prisoner looked pale, and was rather shaky on his legs.

"This is the captain," said Ned ; "Captain Musket, or Mosquito, it sounds like, but I'm such a muff at French !"

"Jean Joseph Moustique," explained the captain in a feeble voice.

Captain Bettesworth made a formal bow, and the Frenchman took off his hat, exhibiting as he did so a long bald space on the side of his head ; in some old combat he had been half scalped by a sabre-slash. As he could speak no English, Tom was again summoned to interpret.

"Tell him he'll be treated with courtesy, and probably released at once on parole ; that I regret the inconvenience, and shall be glad to know if I can do anything for him," said Captain Bettesworth politely.

Tom translated this, and the Frenchman made to salute again ; but his hand dropped and his face turned very white under the lantern. "Monsieur," he said faintly, "the affair is but a change of purgatory ; and since you are so good — may I venture — to ask quickly for a basin — or — or anything. Ah ! mon Dieu ! I can no longer contain my stomach. Pardon !" And he rushed to the side.

"I see !" said Captain Bettesworth. "Are all the rest as bad as that ?"

"Pretty near, sir," answered Ned, grinning.

"They 're lying all over the deck of the schooner, rolling about and groaning ; honest, I did n't have the heart to put them in the hold. Only three or four showed any fight at all, sir."

The prisoner came back unsteadily, with his hand on his stomach. Captain Bettesworth, who was really sorry for the man, told Lieutenant Roberts to put him in a hammock and give him some brandy ; the wounded sailors had already been passed in through a port, and the surgeon was attending to them.

"What in creation induced you to attack a vessel of that size?" asked Captain Bettesworth, as sternly as he could ; but his eyes were twinkling.

"Well, sir," answered Ned, "after we had put the sand on the boat, I just thought I'd climb the hill behind the beach and see what was on the other side of the island ; and there was the schooner tacking down the coast as fine as you please ; you could n't see her, sir, because she was behind the point. I knew the schooner could n't get round the point until after dark" —

"Then why in thunder did n't you come aboard and inform me? You had time enough."

Master Ned's eyes were sparkling, but he had a face of brass. "I was going to do that, sir, but then I thought we'd better make sure the schooner was coming ; so we went over by the point and waited" —

"Until it was too late, eh?"

"Yes, sir ; so of course we had to board her ourselves."

"Don't you know it was nothing short of insanity to tackle that craft with only a cutter and seven men? Just suppose those soldiers had n't been seasick."

"But you see they were, sir," said Ned blandly.

"You may thank your stars! And where did you get the muskets?"

"Oh!" said Ned innocently, "we found them under the sand-bags. Was n't it lucky, sir?"

"You unmitigated imp! Do you mean to tell me that you did n't smuggle those muskets on the cutter?"

"Well, sir," said Ned, driven into a corner, "perhaps they were smuggled. But, as I was saying, it was lucky we had 'em."

The captain emitted something between a chuckle and a snort.

"So we pulled for the schooner" —

"It's mere accident that she did n't blow you out of the water with grape-shot."

"I avoided her broadside, sir," said Ned; "she had only a little way on, and we pulled under her bow."

"That's the first glimmer of common sense in your story!"

"And then somebody hailed us, and the soldiers — three or four that were well, you know — fired and knocked over two of our men, and we boarded quick, and we had her before you could say Jack Robinson, sir; some of the soldiers did n't even get up. Our men covered the deck with their muskets, and the black sailors were most scared

to death. And then all we had to do was to secure the arms and steer for your light; it was just as easy as nothing. I did n't know the French captain was on board until I went down to the cabin, and there he was in a bunk; I never saw anybody so sick, sir; we had trouble enough getting him into the cutter."

"See here!" said the captain. "I don't know whether to put you on bread and water for being such an inconceivable blockhead, or to congratulate you on your most astonishing good luck."

"You might do both, sir," said Ned coolly.

The captain laughed. "I'll let you off from the bread and water this time; until your next scrape, and that will be to-morrow, or I lose my bet. But if ever you do such a thing again — by the Lord Harry, sir, I'll throw you overboard!"

"Yes, sir," said Ned, touching his cap. "Oh! I forgot; here are some letters I found in the cabin of the schooner."

Captain Bettesworth took the letters and went below to examine them; like many Englishmen, he could read French well, though he could hardly speak it intelligibly. Captured letters are always scanned with care, as they may have information of importance. Apparently this batch did contain news of some kind, for in a few minutes a lieutenant ran up with orders to get under way; he called across to the officer in charge of the schooner and told him to leave for Barbados at once.

The corvette came round and ran before the

wind until she got under the lee of Marie Galante, a small island some miles south of Guadeloupe; there she anchored behind a point where she could watch the passage between Marie Galante and Dominica. In this situation she could not be seen by vessels coming from the east or north-east; but Captain Bettsworth took care to be warned of the approach of any such vessels by keeping a boat constantly outside the point.

Here they remained for three days. Everybody understood that they were on the lookout for ships trying to get through the passage, and it was surmised that Ned's letters had contained news of their approach; so his reputation grew. The sanders knew that the schooner would be sold for their benefit, and of course they were enjoying the prize-money in anticipation. As for Master Ned, he had to stand a constant fire of mingled congratulations and chaff; the praise he took airily, and the chaff troubled him not at all, because he could chaff back again with the best of them.

Little Jimmy Ryan, the powder-monkey, came in for his share of notice. He was the youngest boy on the corvette, a general favorite with officers and men; and it was worth something to hear him tell the story in his rich brogue. "Misther Brown, runned down the hill, and he says 'Byes,' he says, 'there's a scunner comin' round the p'int and we'll give her a howly scare wid our guns;' 'and so we will,' says the min. But whin the scunner was beyant in the darrk, Misther

Brown looks at her wid the love-light in his eyes, and he says, 'Shall we boord her?' says he. 'Av coorse, sor,' says we; so we pulled out, and at wanst we heerrd moanin's and groanin's, like it was sowls in purgatory. Jack Rouse whispers it's a slave ship from Afriky and they're murtherin' the naygurs; but Bevins he says it's a buryin' and they're howldin' the wake. Thin somebody called, but divil a worrd would Misther Brown ansther, barrin' that he yelled like bloody murther for the min to pull, and he shoved us in front of her and grabbed a rope, and they fired a broadside of hot mustikry from fourr guns. That made us disgusted wid their forgettin' their manners so, and we did n't wait to see if we was killed, but made wan jump clean over on to her deck, firin' while we was in the air, and me wid me cutlash which oi could n't fire, bad cess to it! And whin we got there we axed permission might we come aboard, and thim that would n't give permission we trowed into the hould of her for to consither about it. But the lave of the sojers all laid still like sacks rollin' about, and wan of thim shtood up on his elbow and rached for his mustik, but oi raymonsthrated wid me cutlash, and he turned away wid a gashly smile on his face and wan hand on his waist-belt. Be that the naygurs was all prayin' on their bended knees, and nobody at the wheel, so she fell off and rowled like a log, and that made the sojers worrse. Oi stipped up to wan of thim and axed him to surrender wid all the purliteness in

the wurld ; and instid of anstherin' loike a gentleman, he turned himself inside out before me eyes. So oi walked away to hide me vexation, and oi gathered up the mustiks in a poile, and we put her head down and run for the corvette."

"Were none of you frightened?" asked Tom.

"Divil a wan of us, sorr, barrin' meself, and oi was n't scared thin, but oi was aftherwards. Sure, oi was drammin' all the while of the prize-money. Do ye think some of the prize-money will be comin' me way, sorr," asked Jimmy wistfully.

"Of course it will," said Tom.

Jimmy clasped his hands in his eagerness. "Oi'm hopin' 't will be a good lump, sorr. Oi niver had but wan prize-money, and that was three shillin'. Will it be as much as that, sorr?"

"Oh, a great deal more than that! It is n't as if the money had to be divided among a whole ship's company. There are only Ned, — Mr. Brown, — and the seven men and you. You will get several pounds ; eight or ten, perhaps."

Jimmy's face was a sight to see. "The saints be praised!" he cried. "Oi'll be sendin' it all to Norah."

"Who is Norah?" asked Tom sympathetically.

"Sure, she's me little sisther, sorr ; the swatest slip of a gurl! She's in Corrk, livin' wid me aunt. Me father and me mither they died, rest their sows ; so there's no one but me to make Norah's fortin for her. Would ye — would ye moind — writin' a letther for me, sorr? Oi can't write ;

and it's thirstin' oi am to get a letther to Norah."

Tom willingly agreed to write the letter.

"It's a blessed angel ye are, sorr, and oi'll serve ye sometime, if oi can. Sure the darlin' will be plased to death to get a letther from me annyway, lettin' alone that she'll learn of the prize-money. Misther Reeve, sorr, it's beggin' yer pardon oi am to be cryin.' Sure, it is n't want of rispeck; but me heart's callin' out for Norah. Maybe ye'll be havin' a little sisther yerself, sorr."

Even prize-money may be sanctified. The rough sailors dispersed quietly; and when Jimmy poured out his loving Irish heart in the letter, Tom could hardly see to write it.

The water being smooth here, the French captain speedily recovered; and as he was good-natured and talkative, he was soon on friendly terms with all the officers; Tom's spare time was largely taken up by translating. The captain said that he and his men had been passengers on the schooner, on their way to Basse-Terre. In the heavy swell along the northeastern coast the vessel had rolled frightfully, and as the soldiers had been out only a few hours, most of them were very sick. "I heard the fracas on deck, but, mon Dieu, at such times one does not trouble one's self about a musket shot or two. It is paralysis, this *mal de mer*."

The officers laughed.

"The young gentleman did his best to make

me comfortable ; as comfortable as one can be when one is standing on his feet one instant and on his head the next. He is a brave lad ; and he tried not to laugh at me, may the fiends take him ! Also, he did not demand my sword ; I think he forgot it."

"In that case perhaps he will ask for it yet," quizzed one of the officers, "now that you have reminded him of it."

"*Peste !* I hope not," said Captain Moustique ruefully ; "I suppose I should have to give it up."

Tom translated this to Ned, but that young gentleman had had quite enough of glory ; he turned very red. "Tell him I don't want his old sword !" he blurted out ; "I'd enough sight rather have a good clasp knife." Whereat the officers roared, and the Frenchman joined in heartily when Tom told him. It happened that he had a very good clasp knife in his pocket ; so he extended it to Ned with a deep obeisance, holding it by the middle of the blade, just as captured officers hold their swords in the pictures. Ned colored again, but took the knife ; and Captain Moustique clapped him on the back while the officers applauded.

"Tell him I'm awfully sorry he's in a scrape," whispered Ned.

"Since he permits me to retain my sword, I have nothing to regret," said the captain good-naturedly. "For the rest, it matters not ; already had I tendered my resignation, since the news that Bonaparte has made himself Emperor."

There was a buzz of excitement when Tom translated this ; it was the first they had heard of it.

"A good general, if you please. I served under this Bonaparte in Italy ; he never spared his soldiers nor himself, and when he led a charge — *chut !* you should have seen him at Lodi ! So we worshiped him, and he could do anything with us. But an emperor ! That is another affair, look you. I am a republican, I, and all is said. Bah ! France wants no emperors !"

"What will you do then ?" asked some one.

"Go to the United States, or to Louisiana ; they say Bonaparte has sold Louisiana to the United States, and there are plenty of good Frenchmen there. Myself, I have a cousin in those parts."

Whether Captain Moustique did eventually go to Louisiana, I cannot say ; but during the rest of the cruise he and Ned were the best of friends. They could not understand each other in the least, but that made no difference. It was funny to see them sitting on a gun, the Frenchman listening gravely while Ned reeled off a string of very idiomatic English, and then taking his turn on quite a different subject. They both enjoyed it hugely.

XI

CLEAR DECK FOR ACTION

THE few French soldiers on Marie Galante did not trouble the corvette, if they knew she was there, and nothing of importance happened until the morning of the fourth day ; then the lookout-boat was seen pulling for the corvette ; the officer consulted for a moment with Captain Bettsworth, and word was passed around that several vessels were approaching from the northeastward. Presently the boat returned to her station, keeping half behind some rocks, and the officer could be seen examining the strangers through his telescope. Meanwhile the sails were set, the corvette was inspected from stem to stern, and small objects were stowed away. Everybody, down to the cook's boy, was in a tremor of expectation ; but the ports remained closed, and things appeared much as usual.

Suddenly the boat pulled back, the men straining at their oars ; and as she swept under the stern the officer caught a rope and swung himself to the deck. A moment more ; then :—

“Clear deck for action !” the order came sharply ; and for the first time Tom saw a vessel stripping herself for battle.

There was little to do above ; but the last bit of raffle was stowed, hammocks were clewed up or taken away, the guns were reprimed, and stacks of muskets and cutlasses were placed ready ; men raced down the deck scattering sand from buckets ; gunners threw off their shirts and tied handkerchiefs about their heads ; cannon-balls were in readiness ; the magazine had been thrown open, and lines of powder-boys were formed. On the berth-deck some movable bulkheads were removed, transforming it into one long room, and the marines were paraded there. Deep down in the cockpit the surgeon and his assistant spread out their table of grim knives and rolled up their sleeves.

The corvette had her anchor catted ; the helm was shifted, and she moved out to the point, where she rounded to with her sails shaking. Tom was standing by the rail when the incoming vessels came into view slowly ; four merchant ships and a frigate convoying them ; they had been making for the passage, and were already in it, nearly south of the Curieux. The corvette's sails filled again as she bore down, catching the strong northeast trade-wind ; every sail drawing and the water boiling in her wake.

The four merchant vessels scattered like hens when a hawk swoops down. But the corvette paid no attention to them ; she had nobler prey in view. Her head was pointed to intercept the frigate if possible ; and the frigate, scorning to dodge so puny an antagonist, kept right on her course. The

two vessels were approaching each other on the arms of a V, and it seemed an even chance which would reach the point first. The frigate showed a French flag, and on the instant the English bunting flew out over the corvette; no false signals between those two!

Ports were thrown open and black muzzles pushed out. Captain Bettsworth sprang on a gun.

"My lads," he cried, "we're going to fight those fellows, and we're going to thrash 'em. They've got a bigger vessel than we have, and more guns and more men; but we're going to thrash 'em for all that. I'll tell you about her. She's the *Italienne* privateer, and she's been doing a lot of mischief; but we're going to stop that. This little vixen can outsail her and outdodge her, and there we've got the advantage of her. But the biggest advantage is that we're English, and we don't care a hang for all the French frigates afloat!"

A storm of cheers rang down the deck.

"Don't waste powder; hold your fire until you can hit, if you have to wait until the yardarms foul; wound her masts if you can. She'll fight hard, and we've got to fight harder and better. Sooner or later we'll get her at a disadvantage, and then we'll give her hot blazes!"

Wild shouts from the gunners as they took their places. Two prize crews had gone out of the corvette, and there were one hundred and twenty men and boys left; very likely the frigate had two hundred and fifty. But what did they care?

Young midshipmen were often sent below — to the hold, under the water-line — when a vessel was going into action ; but in this case the boys were allowed to remain on deck at first, because they might be needed to carry orders ; when the guns are roaring a commander cannot always make himself heard. At present they were stationed amidships, and had nothing to do — the hardest of all work at such times. Tom was certainly scared, but he was more afraid to show it. Ned tried to look unconscious, and succeeded very badly. "Hang it!" he blurted out. "I wish they 'd begin. Fine a chap feels sitting still with the cold shivers running down his back! Can't they fire a gun or something?"

The French captain had been sent below, much to his disgust. "Am I to shut myself in a box just because a cannon or two is fired?" he remonstrated. "Why, man, I was at Montenotte and Arcole!" Captain Bettesworth was inexorable ; he respected the man's courage, but he could not let him expose himself to the fire of his own friends.

The two vessels were now approaching the point of the V, but the frigate was ahead ; suddenly she "wore" — that is, came round with the wind, almost directly in front of the corvette, and heading north-northwest. The corvette put up her helm, and headed south-southeast. The antagonists were now coming from opposite directions, with the wind in favor of the corvette ; they would pass in another minute. Tom held his breath.

To understand a naval combat of those days, you must always remember that vessels were moved by sails only ; consequently, they were dependent on the wind. If it was light, they sailed slowly ; if it died out, they had only such motion as the currents or the tides might give them. With a good wind from one side or the other, or nearly behind, they could sail rapidly ; but they could not sail directly against the wind, and the nearer they pointed to it the slower they sailed. Their build and rig had much to do with their quickness in manœuvring ; a frigate, for example, could move faster than a line-of-battle ship, but she could not turn as quickly as a brig-corvette. And they were made of wood ; iron armor was not introduced until long afterward. Now, a plank will not stop a cannon-ball ; it goes right through, hurling splinters with it, and often it goes through the other side of the vessel too. Besides, these wooden ships might catch fire from powder sparks, or be set on fire. The guns — even the heaviest ones — were small compared with the huge machines of our warships, any one of which could blow a wooden frigate out of the water ; but there were a great many of them. These guns had to be loaded from the muzzle, and before they were reloaded after firing it was necessary to swab them out thoroughly to remove all sparks. When powder and ball were in, they were primed at the touch-hole and fired by a “match,” that is, a long lighted wick.

Shots in the rigging disabled a vessel : they

tore the sails and cut the spars and ropes ; and, though every warship carried materials for repairing such damage, the repairs took time. Cutting of stay-ropes left the masts insecure ; if the masts themselves were splintered, they might fall, hampering everything and dragging in the water until the wreckage could be cleared away, and even then the ship was a cripple. Shots "between wind and water" — that is, in the hull — made holes in the sides, and might kill numbers of men or dismount guns. If such shots were close to the water-line, they let the water in as the vessel rolled. A vessel crossing the course of her adversary, especially behind, had her at a fearful disadvantage ; for she could use all the guns on that side, sweeping the enemy's ship from end to end, and the enemy could answer, at most, only with a few stern or bow guns. This was called "raking," and every fighting vessel manœuvred for a position to rake, while avoiding one in which she could be raked. Such were the conditions of a fight. As for pluck and grit, they were neither more nor less rare than they are now, and they counted for just as much. So did skill and discipline ; the better trained crew was apt to be the victor.

As you may have seen two boys circling round each other before they get to fisticuffs, so did these two vessels. They passed, and the frigate fired her broadside. The range was still rather long, and most of the balls only splashed the water up in jets ; one, better aimed, tore some

ropes in the rigging. The Curieux did not reply, and came round with the wind, trying to get under the frigate's stern; but the French vessel was too spry for her; she tacked quickly and made to run under the corvette's stern. Each vessel had now turned back on her course, and they had to pass again at close range.

Flash! Br-r-r! A dozen cannon-balls whistled through the rigging of the corvette or skimmed across her bows; Tom's face blanched, and he pressed his teeth together. But the Frenchmen had delivered their broadside too quickly, and it did little harm.

"Aim at her hull this time," said Captain Bettesworth, quietly; and the order went down the star-board line of guns. The gunners trained their pieces coolly and waited for the word. "Now give it to 'em!" yelled the captain.

Cr-r-r-rash! went the broadside, one gun following another like a bunch of firecrackers; but no firecrackers were these! the corvette quivered and reeled as the guns were hurled back by the recoil. And through the turmoil came the noise of cracking wood, and a shriek from the frigate. But the men heeded nothing; they were working like mad under the smoke, swabbing, loading, running the guns out, firing when they could, cheering when they could see the effect of a shot, though oftener they could n't, because the choking smoke-pall covered everything; once, when the wind wafted it away, the boys counted a dozen splintered holes in the frigate's side. They had

been called to the quarter-deck now, and from time to time had to run about with orders. Captain Bettsworth told them that he might soon be obliged to send them below.

Again the vessels turned on their courses, but neither could get the advantage of position; it became a running fight, sometimes on the star-board, sometimes on the larboard side, both vessels going with the wind and firing as they could bring guns to bear. A cannon-ball passed Tom, recoiled from a gun and rolled harmlessly on the deck; another crashed through the side and scattered a shower of splinters; a man threw his hand up to his face and it came away all bloody, but he only laughed and sprang to his work again. The Frenchmen were aiming at the corvette's rigging, and from time to time Captain Bettsworth glanced upward uneasily; there were torn sails and frizzled ropes-ends; half a dozen sailors were repairing a stay.

The vessels approached and sheered off, almost scraping their yardarms. The English delivered their broadside, and must have done terrible execution at that distance; through the smoke they could see splinters flying and a dismounted gun. But in the roar of the return broadside, balls seemed flying everywhere, crashing, tearing, wounding; four men were down and had to be carried to the cockpit, dripping blood at every step. It made Tom wince; but the grimy gun-crews only worked the harder. Ned was racing off with an order, and he waved his cap joyously.

The captain glanced aloft again; he spoke quickly and incisively: "Mr. Graves, you *must* clear away that raffle! Take as many men as you need; go, instantly!"

Tom looked up, and was horrified. The sails were full of great holes; braces and sheets had been torn away, and as the corvette came round in the wind she was taken aback; that is, the wind caught the sails in front, throwing their weight against the vessel's course, and she hung helpless, with the frigate coming right under her bow.

"Tell Mr. Roberts I want to speak to him," said Captain Bettesworth, rapidly: "and then get below, quick!" he cried, catching Tom's shoulder and pushing him. Tom ran to deliver the order; but at that instant the frigate passed the corvette's stern, not twenty yards away, and there was a thundering crash. Tom shut his eyes, and when he opened them he wished he had n't. Men writhing on the deck, a gun half wrenched from its place, smoke, splinters, horror; and at his feet lay Jimmy Ryan, trying to raise himself on one elbow. Tom sprang and caught him as he fell again.

"Thank ye, sorr. Me little sisther" —

Lieutenant Roberts bent over the lad. "Dead!" he said sorrowfully; and the tears were streaming down Tom's face as he delivered the captain's order.

"Steady, lads! we'll pay 'em for that!" shouted the lieutenant. Then he turned gently to a sailor,

told him to take little Jimmy's body below, and hurried to the captain. A score of men were already bearing the wounded to the cockpit. Tom felt sick ; but the fighting spirit was on him. "No need to go below now," he said to himself ; "the captain only wanted to get me away from that broadside ;" and he ran back to the quarter-deck.

"Ah, Mr. Reeves !" said the captain, briefly. Tom glanced at the rigging, and his heart sank. A topmast had been shot through and was hanging by the ropes ; a splintered yard was bent at right angles ; some of the sails were rags. But the rigging was full of men slashing away the raffle, recovering the cut ropes, arranging rapid make-shifts. And the corvette had come into the wind again ; the frigate had forged ahead and was not troubling them for the present. The captain and Lieutenant Roberts were consulting in low tones, and when Roberts strode away his eyes were gleaming.

Only part of the frigate's sails were drawing ; she was waiting for the corvette. Both had the wind on the larboard, the corvette approaching on that side, as if she would lay herself beside the frigate ; but as she got nearer she bore down a little, which would have brought her under the frigate's stern. To avoid her, the frigate bore up ; but instantly the corvette bore up also ; her sails had been hauled close and she had the advantage. Still trying to avoid her, the frigate came up more and more until she came up too

far ; her sails shivered and were taken aback ; and at that instant the corvette's helm was jammed down again, while fifty pairs of arms were straining on her head-braces.

The frigate fired half a dozen wild shots ; but her fate was coming, and she knew it. Savage eyes glared through the ports ; a man sprang on the rail and shook his fist. Slowly, inexorably, the corvette glided under the frigate's stern, and as she did so her own foresails were caught aback ; she lay motionless.

It was horrible ! Three raking broadsides followed, one after the other, as fast as the mad-dened men could load ; the first effectually silenced the frigate's quarter-deck guns, which were all she could bring to bear ; the others tore deeper and deeper, and the French could only answer with yells and execrations ; had it lasted much longer they must have struck. But the corvette was all the time paying off — that is, moving sidewise away from her victim — and after the third broadside she fell out of range. The frigate had been fearfully punished. There was a gaping chasm in her stern with a gun hanging half out of it ; another muzzle pointed skyward over the side ; holes could be seen close to the water-line. But the English had fired only at the hull, and the rigging was almost untouched ; the frigate had only lain helpless so long because half a dozen men had fallen at her wheel. Now she caught the wind again.

“ Tack ! ” ordered Captain Bettesworth grimly ; “ we ’ll try to do that again.”

But the French had had quite enough of it; they were crowding every sail to get away. Ned threw up his cap with a shout; a hundred throats broke into wild huzzas; half-naked men, all grimed with powder, crowded to the sides and shook their fists at the flying enemy. They gave chase, but with their slashed and torn rigging it was useless; the corvette quickly fell astern; the fight was over; and down in the cockpit eleven men lay groaning, while one, besides little Jimmy Ryan, was still in death.

The corvette had won mainly by quickness of manœuvring. It was a great victory; a dearly bought victory, and apparently an unprofitable one; yet, considering what she had been through, the *Curieux* was but little injured. Most of the havoc was aloft, and that was repaired in a few hours. For the rest, the carpenters were busy patching up shot-holes, the decks were washed down — there was more than one dark stain that had to be holystoned — and the men cleaned themselves and went to dinner. In the morning prayers were read over two bodies before they were committed to the deep. And with Jimmy's letter to Norah Ryan went another from Captain Bettesworth — oh, so different!

After the rigging was repaired the captain steered westward for twenty-four hours, hoping to fall in with the frigate. About three o'clock in the next afternoon they heard heavy firing to the southward and made toward it, but before they could reach the scene, the battle had ceased.

When they did come up, it was to find their old antagonist — battered and broken — lying with a prize crew beside an English frigate; she had struck her flag after an engagement of fifteen minutes, too much damaged in her first battle to carry on a second one, though the frigate was her inferior in size and guns.

In a few minutes the commander of the English frigate came on board the *Curieux*, and Captain Bettesworth met him with congratulations. "No, sir!" said the visitor; "I came to thank you for the prize; by rights she should be yours, for you beat her, sir, and I only captured what was left of her — and that was n't much; I doubt if we can keep her afloat to Jamaica. Be sure, sir, I shall give you all the credit in my report." And he did. The story of those two battles rang all over England.

The corvette's cruise was over, so far as fighting was concerned. She made two long tacks to the eastward and then ran south, past Dominica. At sunset on the afternoon of the second day after they had left the frigate, they were close under the lee of Martinique, making for its southern end and the Diamond Rock.

Night fell, and the breeze died away; the corvette was almost motionless. The sea was wonderfully smooth, as it often is on the leeward side of these islands; even the long roll was imperceptible, and the vessel lay on an even keel, her canvas drooping and her ropes falling in graceful curves. By and by a soft air crept out from the land,

bringing with it the scent of orange-blossoms and mountain woods. The corvette's sails were trimmed to catch the breeze, but it was so faint that it just served to keep the vessel on her course.

Tom leaned over the rail, baring his head to the cool air and vaguely enjoying himself without knowing or caring why. Somehow the battle and gunpowder and the war and all his dreams of glory seemed a million miles away. The mountains lay sleeping in the moonlight ; he could hear the whisper of little waves along the sand-beaches ; a light twinkled from some cottage, and was gone in a moment. It was hard to believe that the people there were England's enemies and his.

The moon sank below the western horizon, and at midnight Tom's watch went below ; but he lingered on deck. Ned came and spoke to him and then went forward to attend to the trimming of sails. Tom noticed that a boat lay under the stern, secured by a line ; it had been left there, as it often was in calm weather. He climbed over the rail, dropped into the boat and lay down on one of the thwarts, with his knees up and his hands under his head. He looked at the stars and thought of home ; the ripples sang a lullaby, and presently Tom dropped asleep.

He must have slept soundly for an hour or two. Somewhere in his dreams he felt a jolt, and then a lurch which left him sprawling in the bottom of the boat. Springing up, he caught another lurch and sat down in a heap, bewildered. The corvette was gone, and the boat was bumping against a

pebbly beach. He understood it all in a flash. The line had been carelessly secured by some lazy sailor ; the boat had drifted away in the darkness, and the currents and tide had carried it to the shore of Martinique.

XII

A FUGITIVE MIDSHIPMAN

IN after years, Tom confessed that the shock of that discovery was too much for his fortitude; for a moment he lost all hope. Here he was in an enemy's country, free, it was true, but without resources; without food, with only a few coins which he could not use, and without the means of getting away. There were no oars in the boat, and if there had been he could not have rowed the heavy craft more than a mile or two; nor did he know where the Curieux lay. It was very dark, but he could dimly see that he was in a little bay, and he thought he could discern houses back of the sand. The boat kept thumping and lurching, broadside against the beach, for the tide was still coming in, though there was no surf in this sheltered place. The shore was deserted, and it was evident that he had not been noticed. That was small comfort, however; in two or three hours, at most, there would be people to see and arrest him.

But after the first moment, Tom had no mind to be captured; the treatment he had received before was too fresh in his memory, and he imagined — very unjustly — that all the Frenchmen

in Martinique were like the brute who had penned him on the Curieux. He sat up and tried to think. Could he not remain free? There were English ships near. There was the Diamond Rock, close to the southern end of this very island; if he could reach the shore near it he might swim to the Rock, though it would be a long pull. He might find friends, fishermen or fruit-sellers who had come off to the Diamond and seen him, and would be willing to help him now. At Tom's age one does not despair all at once.

His first and most obvious necessity was concealment; it was clear that he could not remain on the open beach. He knew, in a general way, that the central part of the island was wooded and mountainous, and there he would be likely to find the most secure cover. Besides, his mind kept running to the Diamond Rock. It was at the southern end of the island, and he was far to the north, thirty miles from it, perhaps; he could not make his way along the shore, for the coast region was thickly inhabited; even if he took the right road he would be discovered. Once among the mountains he might push his way southward. His best plan, then, was to travel inland until he reached the forest.

With a sigh, he prepared to leave the boat; but first he searched it from end to end. There was nothing in the bottom; but in a locker under the stern he found a pistol with a few loads of powder and ball, which had been forgotten by some officer; he strapped the pistol to his side

and put the ammunition in his pocket. There was also a pipe, which he took, though he did not want it; a burning glass, no doubt used to light the pipe; and a crumpled wad of paper. He was going to throw the paper away, but stopped to unroll it, and was delighted to find two broken ship-biscuits, a roasted potato, half eaten, and a slice of dried beef, the remains of somebody's luncheon. Tom was hungry, and under ordinary circumstances he might have eaten one of the biscuits; but he wisely concluded to keep all the provisions in reserve.

Crossing the beach, he came to a road and a cluster of houses. There was, in fact, a little village, and he clutched his pistol and began to run when a dog barked; but no one was stirring. A hundred yards away was a battery, with sleeping soldiers and sentinels pacing to and fro; but they did not hear him, and when the boat was discovered in the morning, drifting out with the tide, they only reported her as a derelict, never imagining that an English middy had floated ashore in her. As for Tom, he knew nothing about the sentinels or the battery; so he trudged along rapidly, keeping his hand on his pistol, and only anxious to get away from the houses before day broke.

The road turned southward and climbed a ridge, passing by great fields of sugar-cane. Beyond the ridge was a plantation house, with more cane-fields; Tom could hear the lapping of waves, and knew he was following the coast. The road, too,

was wide and evidently much traveled ; he was afraid of meeting a patrol or some early wayfarer. Keeping on the left side, he peered through the gloom, hoping to find some branch road leading inland ; once he turned off on a track which promised well, but it ended, after half a mile, in a cane-field ; so he had to return to the main road. Following this over another ridge, he descended to a valley and a stream, where there was a wooden bridge ; as he crossed it, another dog bayed hoarsely from some houses by the banks, and he thought he heard a man walking. Probably it was the dog, but Tom did n't stop to investigate ; he ran past the houses, and by great good fortune the road forked just beyond, one branch leading eastward towards the mountains which he could dimly see against the sky. Turning into this, he pushed on with more confidence, running at intervals, because he knew that the night was almost spent. Twice he heard cocks crowing.

Now the road began to ascend through a long valley ; it was rough to his feet, too, and more than once he stumbled. Then he climbed a hill, and another beyond, always going higher. Out of breath at length, he sat down on a stone to rest. The sky was gray over the mountain-tops ; in half an hour it would be broad daylight, and then he must hide himself as best he could ; in a thicket or a cane-field, perhaps. If he could only reach the great forest !

Suddenly, from the hillside above, came the notes of a wild creole song. Tom sprang up and

glanced around ; there was no cover near, not even a bush. He turned to run back : no, that would not do ; the singers were drawing nearer and would certainly see or hear him ; the bold course would be the best. Tearing off his jacket, he threw it over his arm, the lining above ; luckily he wore a cap, and perhaps they would not notice it in the gloom. So he advanced, trying to appear at ease, though he was far from feeling so.

The song ceased, and two barefooted negresses appeared, walking rapidly, almost noiselessly, with a curious, gliding motion ; they carried heavy burdens on their heads. The women were *porteuses*, carriers and fruit-sellers, who had started thus early for a tramp, perhaps, of thirty miles. These *porteuses* are a class peculiar to the French West Indies ; they are trained to the work from childhood, and can carry almost incredible weights—sometimes a hundred and fifty pounds. In point of fact, Tom was pretty safe from pursuit by the *porteuses*, because they cannot set down their loads without aid. But they had no suspicion that an English midshipman was advancing to meet them. “*Bonjou*’, *missié*,” said the first, in the creole dialect ; “*bonjou*’,” said the second ; and they passed on. Tom pulled his cap over his eyes and said never a word. Farther down the road the *porteuses* turned stiffly under their burdens and looked back at him, wondering why a white lad with shoes was abroad so early in the morning, and wondering more at his lack of courtesy. “For look you, my dear, even a robber says good-morn-

ing," remarked one. But the portouzes had their own business to attend to, and presently they forgot the ill-mannered stranger — which was lucky for Tom.

When they were out of sight, he drew a long breath and took to his heels ; but presently he heard a tinkling bell, and then the clatter of hoofs. Darting behind some bushes, he waited to let a muleteer pass with his two loaded animals. Clearly, Martinique was waking up ; the road was far too public for a fugitive midshipman.

There was a scrubby thicket extending up the mountain-side ; he would try to push his way through it. But three minutes sufficed to show him the futility of that plan. First he tripped on a vine and went sprawling. Getting on his feet again he essayed a step, and sprang back with a yell ; he thought a snake had bitten him, but it was a spine, like a bodkin, which had pierced his knee ; the bushes were bristling with them. His hand touched a leaf, and it burned like hot iron ; Tom had seen these great tropical nettles on the Diamond, and he had a wholesome respect for them. Avoiding the plant, he took half a dozen steps in a new direction, and was literally tied up with a tangle of cord-like creepers. Wriggling out of it somehow, his hands were cut by razor grass ; a dozen thorny fish-hooks caught in his clothes ; he just saved his face from the needles of a cactus, only to tussle with an acacia bush which clung like a bramble ; his fingers were all bleeding before he could get rid of it. And right in front of

him was a vegetable wall, bamboos, vines, bushes, thorns, leaves, parasites, all in one dense mass.

Tom was familiar with English woods, and had seen a little of tropical vegetation on the Diamond and elsewhere ; but he had no conception of these thorny jungles. Even an experienced man will never attempt to cross one except by daylight ; and armed with a cutlass or axe, he must literally hew his way. Tom had no cutlass, and it was still too dark to avoid the thorns ; no wonder that he had suffered ! Bewildered, frightened, dripping with perspiration, he managed to get back to the road. If a mere thicket was like this, what would the forest be ?

Yet he must conceal himself, and quickly ; already the sky was flecked with crimson clouds and the mountain-tops were gilding to the sunrise ; at any moment he might encounter a peasant or a patrol of soldiers. The increasing light gave him one comfort : he could see that the open lands and settlements had been passed ; close by, and far up the slopes, were masses of dark green woods. The view behind was shut in by the hills, but he judged that he must be several miles from the sea. The road — now a mere footpath — ran down into a little hollow, where he could hear the tinkling of water. He was very thirsty ; he could drink there and seek some hiding-place. So he hurried on.

In the hollow he found a rivulet running across the road ; stepping-stones had been set in it, but there was no bridge. Tom glanced up the bed of the stream. Great trees arched over it ; the banks

were hung with ferns and strange, broad-leaved plants ; the channel was littered with great rocks, all mossy and glorious with the ferns that clung to every crevice ; the water rippled and gurgled around them, making little pools and cascades ; curtains of vines hung down to it, and a graceful palm rose, straight as an arrow, to its crown of dark green leaves. Tired and frightened as Tom was, he found a moment to admire the scene ; and then it flashed across him that here was a pathway carved out by nature ; the rivulet must have its source high in the mountains, and he had but to follow it up.

Leaping from stone to stone, he was quickly out of sight of the road ; then he stopped for a drink of the deliciously cool water, and hurried on. It was easy enough at first. Sometimes he could walk freely on flat rocks ; sometimes he had to clamber over banks or push his way through the bushes ; but there were no thorns, and only a few tangling vine-stems. Once or twice, where the high rocks approached each other, he had to wade, carrying his shoes in his hand to keep them dry. Gradually the forest closed in on both sides ; the banks grew higher and steeper, until he found himself in a deep ravine with woods all around. Now the way was harder ; twice he came to waterfalls where the stream flowed over precipices, but he managed to pass them by climbing up the banks.

A feeling of security came over him ; surely, no one ever came here ! He was very tired, and

hungry as only a boy can be. Throwing himself down in a sheltered nook, he drew out his scanty supply of provisions and ate one of the biscuits, resolutely returning the rest to his pocket. He ate very slowly, stopping now and again for a long draught of water ; that, at least, was plentiful enough. Then he stretched himself on a mossy bank and slept soundly for an hour or two ; luckily his naval training had accustomed him to watches and short spells of sleep. So far he was none the worse for his adventures.

He awoke refreshed and hopeful ; the sun was peering over the treetops, and it was on the left as Tom faced up the ravine. Now the sun rises in the east ; consequently, the ravine had its head southward and nearer to the Diamond Rock. Tom always thought of the Diamond Rock as the goal towards which he must struggle if he would reach friends and liberty ; so he pushed on again, elated with his prospects and even rather proud of himself. What would Ned say ? And what a glorious letter he would write to his mother ! Tom felt very brave when he thought of that letter and the sensation it would create at home. How his mother would hold her breath over some exciting episode ! And how the girls would clasp their hands and exclaim that he was a young hero ! And how entirely correct their opinion would be ! So he advanced joyously, and thought — boy-like — that the danger was all past.

XIII

THE MOUNTAIN FOREST

NOW that he was safe from immediate pursuit, Tom could see what a wonderful new world he was in: a forest smothered in its own luxuriance. It rolled up the mountain-side, one struggling, exuberant mass of green; it hung smooth curtains to the water's edge, and threw festoons over the cliffs, and draped and sprayed and tangled until everything seemed merged with everything else. If there were palms Tom did not notice them, because their slender stems were so inconspicuous and the leaves were far overhead. What he did notice was the maze of vine-stems, some straight as stay-ropes, others looped and twisted and twining about each other; round stems and flat ones, smooth or knotted or spiny or crooked or pierced with holes; and all these stems disappeared in the forest roof; he wondered why they showed so few leaves. In reality, the vines spread their foliage above, often clambering over half a dozen trees and perhaps dropping to the ground a hundred yards from their roots. The top of a tropical forest is largely made up of vines.

On the mountain-side there was little undergrowth, but down in the valley was a forest of ferns

under the other ; Tom could walk in it, with the great, delicate fronds high over his head ; and there were tree-ferns which he took for palms. The ferns covered the rocks and logs everywhere ; they were draped all over the trees, — broad-leaved forms, and others like fairy lace-work, or narrow as fine grass-leaves but hanging a yard down. And then there were the mosses, six inches thick sometimes, and streaming from the branches, green, golden, red, a wonderful mass ; even the leaves were mossy in places. Tom had imagined that tropical forests were full of strange, broad-leaved plants and gorgeous flowers ; we get such ideas from pictures and greenhouses. There were some banana-like plants and great arums by the water's edge, but he hardly noticed them among the ferns.

A vague fear crept over him : what if there were unknown dangers in the shadowy depths ? He had been told that there were no large wild animals in the West Indies, and, indeed, it was not animals he dreaded, but an intangible something that his imagination conjured up ; he tried to laugh the notion away, but it would come back again, like the hobgoblin stories of his boyhood. Then he remembered that there were poisonous serpents in Martinique ; he had heard the sailors talking about them, averring that they were found only in this and one or two other islands. Now Tom had an Englishman's rather unreasonable dread of snakes, and for an instant he was half minded to turn back ; but then he was ashamed

of his own cowardice. Here, at least, was a real danger, and it served to drive away his imaginary ones. Drawing out his pocket knife, he cut a sapling with some difficulty — the wood was very hard — and trimmed and fashioned it to a club ; then he went on, treading gingerly among the roots and keeping a sharp lookout.

For a time the ravine was wide, with swampy places where he sank in over his ankles ; then it narrowed to a mere cañon, with cliffs rising a hundred feet above the water. He pushed on for a quarter mile farther, until he was stopped by a succession of deep pools and waterfalls, with precipices on both sides ; he could not climb the precipices, and even if he swam the pools, the falls were unsurmountable.

Turning back, he found a place where the side of the ravine looked promising, and began to climb ; but at the end of half an hour he sat down, exhausted, at the foot of a towering cliff. After resting a few minutes, he skirted the cliff for half a mile, and found it broken by a long slope, probably an old landslide ; it was hot work ascending this, for there were no trees on it, and the sun was right over his head ; it was steep, too, and even dangerous ; but he had been trained on the Diamond as well as in the rigging of the Centaur, and he stuck to it doggedly, clinging to grass and bushes and digging his feet into the clay where it threatened to slide from under him. Two or three hundred feet up he reached the forest again, and the slope was easier ; but it was all strewn with rocks

and a tangle of vines that made the obstacles tenfold worse. Moreover, he was weak from hunger by this time, for he had resisted the temptation to eat the rest of his food.

At length he came to a path or track, on the summit of a ridge between the valley he had left and another beyond. The path was a very old one, and apparently had not been used for months; with some misgivings Tom decided to follow it up the ridge. After an hour it came to an end abruptly, where two or three ridges joined. For a while he followed one of these ridges, and then descended a slope until it grew steeper and suddenly broke off in a dizzy precipice. Scrambling back and taking a new direction, he was stopped again by a precipice above. By this time the poor boy was completely bewildered: he could not have traced his way back; he did not know where he was, or what direction to take; the precipices seemed to bar his way on every side. Too late, he realized that he should have concealed himself in the first woods and gone back to the coast road at night. In seeking safety he had lost himself among the mountains.

And now came a fresh misery: the air was darkened and a torrent of cold rain swept over the trees; he was wet through and shivering in a minute. The sun broke out again, as it does after these showers, but every moss-laden leaf was dripping; the forest was like a wet sponge.

Helplessly wandering here and there, he found himself, at three o'clock in the afternoon, in an-

other deep valley, apparently shut in on all sides by lofty, forest-covered mountains ; not a clearing or a track in sight. He was too tired to go farther, and he knew that if he did it might only make his situation more hopeless. But Tom was Anglo-Saxon : the old spirit held, and he would not give up ; somehow he would find his way out. There was a stream in the valley, and he resolved to follow it down in the morning. Meanwhile he must, perforce, sleep where he was, and he was wet and cold ; the night would be colder, and he saw the necessity of making a fire while he could.

Tom knew nothing of wood-craft, but he was self-reliant and resourceful, and necessity is the best teacher. The burning-glass would serve to light a fire, but only while the sun was high ; luckily it had been shining for two hours after the rain, and the valley was wide and comparatively dry ; dead wood was plentiful. Carefully selecting twigs where the brush-heaps were exposed to the sun, he made a little heap of them on a flat rock by the stream ; then he whittled a stick to fine shavings and thrust them under the heap ; and finally he held the glass so as to concentrate the sun's rays on the heap. It was a doubtful attempt with such material, but fortunately the glass was a powerful one ; the ends of the shavings blackened and curled, and then smoked, and then burst into flame. Tom gave a shout of delight and hastened to throw on more twigs ; he laid dry branches on them, one over the other, until there was a crackling red tower ; he dragged up logs, the least

sodden that he could find, and put them on the fire; and he built another great pile beside it as a reserve. Setting a pole before the blaze, he hung his jacket on it to dry; sun and fire together soon made his shirt comfortable.

His precious package of provisions was damp, but he managed to toast the remaining biscuit on a forked stick, and ate it and the potato and dried beef to the last morsel. Then he gathered moss and held it bit by bit before the flames until it was dry and fit for a bed; spreading it on the rock, he lay down to sleep. Once he was startled by harsh cries overhead; but it was only a flock of parrots coming back from their feeding-place and screaming as they flew. After that the woods were very silent, and darkness came on apace; it was mysterious and uncanny under the trees; but the firelight was cheerful, the moss bed was dry and soft, and Tom felt very comfortable, though he was still hungry. Luckily for his peace of mind, he did not notice a snake that wriggled out of one of his fire-logs and slipped off towards the stream. Luckily also it did not rain, for he had no shelter. Two or three times, as the fire burned low, he was awakened by the cold; but he piled on fresh logs and turned in again, glad to get rid of the familiar night-watches.

Daylight found him refreshed, but oh, so hungry! He would gladly have given a year's pay for one biscuit. He even attempted to eat some forest fruits that were scattered about; but they were so bitter and nauseous that he quickly threw

them away in disgust. In the stream were tiny fish, — not over two inches long, — and he tried to catch them in his hands and cap ; but they were too active for him. Sensible at length that he was wasting precious time, he drew his belt tighter and set himself sturdily to finding a way out of the woods.

That was a terrible day for Tom. The forest was dripping with yesterday's rain, and he was wet and shivering until the sun dried his clothes. He tried to follow down the stream, but its valley soon narrowed to a cañon with perpendicular sides, which he could not penetrate ; so he turned and followed the valley up, but came to another cañon, and all the little branches led to impassable falls. Then he climbed a ridge, and wandered all day among the mountains, — now stopped by precipices, now crawling along dizzy knife-edges with yawning chasms on both sides, now deep in valleys, — footsore, tired, and always with the gnawing hunger beneath his belt. Several times he found old tracks and tried to follow them, but they were soon lost.

Late in the afternoon he made a cheerless camp, and lay down without food, and this time without water, for he had seen none since noon. In his sleep he tossed and moaned feverishly, and dreamed of home, and impossible banquets which vanished when he reached out for them, and left him staring into the black forest, alone with his hunger and thirst and misery.

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About noon of the next day a wretched, despairing boy dragged himself down a path and out of the forest. His shipmates would hardly have recognized Tom, so changed he was, — all his old jauntiness gone, his bright uniform shabby and covered with mud, his hands and face scratched and clay-stained, his cap lost, and his eyes glaring hopelessly under his matted locks. For Tom had decided to give himself up: he would declare his plight to the first person he met, and take what fate might bring him if it only brought rest and food.

On the edge of the woods there was a small clearing, — a provision-ground, where some negro workman planted roots and herbs for home use. Had Tom known it, he might have dug sweet potatoes and carried them back to the forest as lawful spoils of war; but he had never learned to distinguish these or the other plants, and the place was so neglected and full of weeds that he did not notice it at all, but limped wearily on. The path led him through another strip of woods and across a stream, ending suddenly in a great plantation of sugar-cane.

Now Tom was familiar with sugar-cane, and he suddenly remembered that it was good to eat; he had often bought it of the fruit-sellers, either in the stalk or cut up in tempting white bits full of sweet juice. He did not know that it is very nourishing, so that thousands of negro workmen practically live on fresh cane during the season; it was delicious, and he was terribly hungry: that

was enough. Trembling with eagerness, he pulled out his pocket knife and began to hew down one of the great stalks. It was very hard on the outside, but he persevered, hacking and sawing until he had two stalks. Then he dragged them to the woods, a little away from the path and near the stream, and sat down to his feast.

Oh, how sweet that sugar-cane was! It took him a long time to eat it, for each joint had to be cut separately through the hard outer covering, and then peeled. Probably, in the boy's weakened state, this was fortunate for him, for he only got a little of the juice at a time and could not gorge himself. He cut and peeled and chewed for an hour, until the ground all about him was littered with the shavings and chewed pith. He had scratched his fingers on the harsh edges of the leaves, and the tiny bristles with which they were covered got into his clothes and irritated his skin; but he did not mind that. Here was food—abundance of food, to be found anywhere outside of the woods. After all, was there any necessity for giving himself up?

At any rate there was no hurry about it; the sharp edge of his hunger was gone, and he was very tired; so he lay down among the cane peelings and went to sleep, forgetting that he was near the path and near a road which he had seen in the cane-field. He had unstrapped his pistol, and it lay by his side, but he did not think of that.

XIV

MADEMOISELLE

AFTER awhile he rolled over uneasily and then stood up, rubbing his eyes.

"*Halte là !*" came a voice. It was a very silvery voice, but very peremptory. Tom halted accordingly and turned round.

He was amazed to see a girl standing not five paces away and pointing a pistol straight at his head ; his own pistol, too. She was quite a little girl, not more than ten or eleven years old, dressed neatly in white, with a long skirt according to the fashion of the time ; but this was tucked loosely into a most incongruous pair of great boots, which reached above her knees ; on her head was a bright red cap. And whether she was pretty or not, Tom could n't have told for the life of him ; for her face was screwed up into such a terrible and vindictive frown, and her dark eyes snapped so, that she looked more like a small tiger than like the odd little French girl that she was.

Tom dodged : he could n't help it, the thing was so sudden, and the black muzzle was looking right into his face. The little girl laughed — such a queer, scornful cackle — and followed his movements with the pistol.

“Rendez-vous, scélérat !”

Tom winced ; he did n't like to be called a scoundrel, especially by a girl. And the summons to surrender was ridiculous ; how could he surrender to her ?

“For goodness' sake, mademoiselle,” he exclaimed, “take care ! That pistol is loaded ; it might go off.”

“It is loaded,” said Mademoiselle ; “moreover it is cocked, and without doubt it will go off and shoot you if you try to run away or venture one step nearer to me. Monsieur, I am a French-woman.”

Tom gasped.

“Also, I know how to use firearms : I have practiced with a pistol every day during many years.”

“How many, I wonder ?” thought Tom.

“Consequently, as I remarked, I shall shoot you dead unless you surrender immediately.”

“Mademoiselle” —

“You are an English officer, and therefore a pig. All the English are pigs.”

Tom thought this a trifle strong.

“And you slept like a pig in the midst of the *vagasse*” — here she glanced at the sugar-cane peelings — “which betrayed you to me because it was white through the trees. I came and observed. Instantly I recognized your uniform, for I have seen many English officers, I. Overcome with rage I grasped your pistol, but I could not shoot you sleeping, because I am French. I said to

myself, 'Heavens, if I should be mistaken! Therefore I will hold myself in readiness until this pig of an Englishman awakes, and I will then take him prisoner.' You awake, and your accent also proclaims you; it is vile."

Poor Tom! He had prided himself on his accent.

"The French nation is the most polite in the world."

It occurred to Tom that he had heard more polite language in England.

"It is also the bravest and the most generous. As for you, you are an Englishman, concealed on a French island; therefore you are a spy, and by the laws of war you must be put to death."

Tom could not help acknowledging to himself that she had stated his position with force and brevity. He said nothing, simply because he was too much astounded to speak; a military and sanguinary baby was bad enough, but an infant lawyer was worse.

"But, behold me, I am not an executioner, I; there are men paid for such work."

Tom winced.

"Therefore I shall merely arrest you and deliver you to an officer, who will put you in prison" —

"Mademoiselle" — faltered Tom.

"It is necessary to be exact. You will be tried and found guilty, and then you will be hanged or else guillotined. I should prefer the guillotine for my part; it is more genteel."

To Tom's imagination it did not seem at all genteel.

"You are secured to a plank, and the plank turns, and at the same instant a knife descends and shaves your head off without the least trouble to you or anybody else. It is a very humane invention, and worthy of the great French nation."

"But, mademoiselle, I don't want to go to prison, and I don't want to have my head cut off."

"That has nothing to do with the matter. The mission of the French nation is to give liberty and happiness to all the world. Therefore we cut off the heads of aristocrats and Englishmen. And my mission is to take you prisoner. Now surrender or I will shoot."

A lucky thought occurred to Tom. "Mademoiselle," he said, with as much gallantry as he could muster, "an officer cannot resist a lady. I surrender to your bright eyes."

Instantly Mademoiselle swept a curtsy, as well as she could in her great boots; the frown on her face gave way to a charming smile as she lowered the pistol. "Monsieur is given to compliments," she remarked. "But doubtless you are right. I shall now put you on your honor."

Tom bowed.

"As you understand a lady's feelings, you must be a gentleman. You may promise not to run away."

Tom followed up his advantage. "Mademoi-

selle," he said, "you surely do not imagine that I would attempt to run away from you!"

Mademoiselle curtsied again. Then she broke off a great leaf and began to fan herself with it. "On the whole," she added, in quite a matter-of-fact way, "I shall not have you guillotined. I shall keep you to play with."

This sudden veer of wind nearly knocked Tom over. Recovering himself, he began to falter thanks.

"Bah!" said the little lady; "it is nothing. In general I detest the English; but you are an exception — except that you are very dirty."

Tom looked ruefully at his uniform.

"Why did you go to sleep there? Are you not afraid of the *fer-de-lance*?"

"What is the *fer-de-lance*?" asked Tom.

"Don't you know, then? It is a snake — ugly — and venomous. Consequently it resembles the English," she added, with a touch of her former spite.

Tom glanced around hurriedly. "Are there snakes here?" he asked, in some trepidation. "I have seen none."

"Mostly they are in the cane-fields at this season. But one can never tell. Two of our field-hands were bitten last month, and one died."

"And are you not afraid?" asked Tom.

Mademoiselle drew herself up to a height of almost four feet. "Monsieur," she said, with hauteur, "I have already observed that I am a Frenchwoman. The French fear nothing, not even

a fer-de-lance. It is because of them that I wear boots, as thus," pointing to her feet. "Yet it is true," she added reflectively, "that I am afraid of mice."

This was too much for Tom : he laughed outright. "I beg your pardon," he pleaded, "but it seems so odd ; because mice are harmless, you know."

"You may laugh, then ; but they are hideous. Therefore I get up on a chair and commend myself to God. Now tell me how you came here."

Tom told briefly how he had floated ashore in a boat and had been wandering in the woods. Mademoiselle clapped her hands with delight. "Then you are a fugitive !" she exclaimed. "As for me, I adore fugitives. I shall now rescue you."

Tom fervently hoped that she might rescue him, but was not clear as to the manner of doing it. "I am sorry that I stole the sugar-cane, if it was yours," he said, very humbly ; "but I was so hungry, you know. I had had nothing to eat since night before last."

"*Ciel !*" cried Mademoiselle, clasping her hands ; "it is piteous. You are perishing of hunger ! Come straight home with me and I will demand a fowl. Do you like fowl ?"

Tom admitted that he liked fowl ; he would have liked anything edible at that moment. "But, mademoiselle," he objected, "I cannot go to your house ; they would capture me and put me in prison, and perhaps cut my head off."

The little lady stamped her foot. "They will

not dare!" she cried. "Is it not I who defend you?"

"Still," insinuated Tom, "it will be safer if I remain in the woods. Besides," he added, observing that she frowned impatiently, "I am not fit to be seen."

"That is true," remarked the little girl. She was dreadfully direct in her speeches.

"And I might get you or your family into trouble if you befriended me."

Mademoiselle pondered for a moment. Then she said briefly, "Remain!" and ran off through the cane-field, her boots clattering over the path. Tom noticed that she took the pistol with her.

She was gone half an hour, and during the interval there was a distant shot which alarmed him not a little. But presently he heard the clatter of the boots again, and Mademoiselle appeared — such a sight! She was flushed with running, her hair was all tangled and flying in the wind, her white dress was soiled and splotched with the blood that covered her hands; and she was hugging the pistol, a dead hen, and a loaf of bread. "*Voici!*" she said, out of breath.

"Good heavens, mademoiselle! Are you wounded?" exclaimed Tom.

"Wounded? No. Ah, the blood: that is from the hen. I shot it with the pistol."

"But, mademoiselle" —

"The hen? It was mine. I do not often shoot hens, though they are admirable marks. It was in the cane-field, and no one observed me. As for

the noise, they will think I was practicing at a mark, as I often do. Once I shot Jean by mistake, but he got well. Jean is one of the house servants. Before I shot the hen I ran to the kitchen and hid this loaf under my handkerchief. It was delightful : I never had occasion to steal anything before. Now eat some bread."

"But, mademoiselle, I do not want you to steal for me ; and they will miss it."

"*N'importe pas* ; I can have all the bread I want. Now eat it," she commanded again. Tom munched the loaf, staring at his remarkable new acquaintance and wondering what she would do next.

"What is your name?" she asked, and Tom told her, but she tried vainly to pronounce it. "These villain names !" she exclaimed. "Do the English break their jaws, then, that they may say them? I am called Lucie de la Bourdonier, and I was born in Paris during the Reign of Terror."

Tom was interested.

"My grandfather looked through the little window and sneezed into the basket."

"He what?" queried Tom, bewildered.

"The guillotine, *drôle*; he was a Girondin. Sometimes they call me a Child of the Revolution."

Tom thought she looked like it, but was too polite to say so.

"They guillotined the King before that. As for me, I hate kings. But it is necessary to distinguish. I adore emperors."

"But an emperor is a king, is n't he?"

"Nothing of the kind. General Bonaparte is Emperor now, and it stands to reason that he can't be a king, because he is a republican, you know."

Tom tried to look convinced, but the reasoning seemed a trifle hazy.

"Mademoiselle Tascher is Empress."

"Who is that?"

"Madame Bonaparte, you know; in Martinique we call her Josephine Tascher, because that was her name here. Afterwards she was Madame Beauharnais, and then Madame Bonaparte."

Tom had heard of this lady, though she was comparatively unknown in 1804.

"So she is Empress. As for me, no doubt I shall be a duchess, or perhaps a princess."

Tom stared and almost whistled, but there was a great piece of bread in his mouth.

"It is most true. Consider: my mother was related to the Tascher family. It follows that I am a sort of cousin to the Empress of France."

Here was an astonishing piece of news. Tom had all an English lad's reverence for royalty, and what the child said might be true.

"Doubtless I shall be called to Court. I shall be magnificently dressed, and I shall salute the Empress with a grand air, thus;" here she half knelt and pretended to kiss somebody's hand. "Do I look like a princess?"

Tom was n't sure that she did, but he bowed with his hand on his heart.



"I SHALL BE A DUCHESS"

"However, that is of no consequence ; at present I am going to skin the hen." In the West Indies a fowl is never plucked for cooking, but feathers and skin are removed together. "Alas !" exclaimed Mademoiselle ; "I forgot to bring a knife !"

"I have a pocket knife," said Tom. "But, mademoiselle, you must n't trouble yourself with such an unpleasant job ; I can manage it."

"You have nothing to do with it !" said Mademoiselle ; "I am going to skin the hen myself. I never did skin a hen. It must be delightful. Now lend me your knife."

Tom handed out the knife, rather unwillingly, and Mademoiselle immediately attacked the hen with great spirit, holding it in her lap while she worked. At the end of five minutes it would have been difficult to say which was more gory, the hen or Mademoiselle. She laid down the knife and looked at the mess rather disconsolately. "It is a very remarkable hen," she said feelingly.

Clatter-pat, clatter-pat, came a sound of galloping hoofs through the cane-field. "Ah !" said Mademoiselle, glancing up coolly, "it is doubtless Monsieur my father ; he is looking for me." She arose, clasping what was left of the hen as she peered through the branches ; then she gave a clear whistle. Tom's first impulse was to run, but he remembered that he was a prisoner ; so he stood up too and waited with a very red face.

XV

MONSIEUR DE LA BOURDONIER

THE hoof-beats turned into the thicket and there was a rustling among the leaves; Tom's heart beat wildly. A tall, handsome gentleman rode into the glade, pushing the branches aside. He was dressed like a planter, in dark clothes, long boots, and a broad-brimmed felt hat; but he sat very erect in his saddle, and there was something soldier-like and stern about his face. Glancing quickly from Tom to the little girl, he bowed slightly and drew rein; there was the ghost of a smile twitching about his lips. Mademoiselle curtsied and looked as imposing as she could under the circumstances.

"Explain, mademoiselle," said the gentleman.

"Willingly, monsieur. We are skinning a hen."

"So I perceive." The gentleman glanced at the feather-strewn soil, and his mouth twitched again.

"This is an English officer. I should be charmed to introduce him, but, my father, his name is unpronounceable. We are going to cook the hen; that is, if we ever get through skinning it. I took him prisoner."

"You took the hen prisoner?"

"No, monsieur," said Mademoiselle, "I shot the hen. But I captured the English officer."

"Eh?"

"I captured him. At present he is paroled. He is a spy, and beyond doubt extremely dangerous. But he is very interesting. Consider: he came on shore from an English vessel and has been wandering in the forest for days and days. That is why I shot the hen for him; even Englishmen must eat, my father. In addition, he is polite. And he speaks French very well, considering; I have hardly any difficulty in understanding him."

Monsieur de la Bourdonier's face had grown sterner as he looked at Tom. "If this young gentleman is an English officer—and his uniform is English—he is here for no good purpose. I must take him to Fort-de-France."

Tom started and turned pale. The little girl threw down her streaky burden, clasping her hands. "My father, no!" she cried.

"We must do our duty, my dear," said the gentleman, kindly enough. "Remember that we are French, and an Englishman—even a boy"—he looked pityingly at Tom, who turned red again—"even this young Englishman, is an enemy of our country, and may be a dangerous one, too." His lips were set, but he hesitated; Tom's youth appealed to him.

Mademoiselle sprang before Tom as if she would protect him. "Monsieur," she cried, "you must not! You are my father, but you have no right to take him; he is my prisoner, mine; I took

him myself ; I refuse to deliver him to be killed ! Oh, my father, have pity ! Consider : he is but a child ; and besides, he is starving, and the hen is not yet cooked." Then she stamped her foot passionately, "You shall not ! I say you shall not ! He belongs to me !" Suddenly she clasped her father's great riding boot and burst into a storm of tears.

Monsieur de la Bourdonier stooped and patted her head. "Tut !" he said ; "the lad shall have something to eat, and I will ask the commandant to treat him kindly. It was his own fault to come here."

"Pardon, monsieur, it was not his fault ; he has explained to me. They will guillotine him, and I passed my word that he should not be guillotined. Consider, monsieur : a Frenchwoman may not break her word ; it is not allowed in the best society."

"They will not guillotine him. Anyway, you have nothing to do with it."

"Alas, sir, he is my prisoner !"

"Nonsense ! A Frenchwoman does not tell fibs, either."

The little girl sprang back and drew herself up proudly, her lip quivering. "Monsieur," she said, "I never tell fibs. I took him prisoner."

"Impossible !" The gentleman frowned, but he looked uneasy.

Tom thought it high time to interfere, even though it forced him to pocket his pride. "Monsieur," he said, "Mademoiselle speaks the exact

truth; she really did take me prisoner. She pointed my own pistol at my head, and I had to surrender."

The gentleman opened his eyes very wide; then he burst out laughing. "Really, this is too droll! So my little daughter has turned soldier, and distinguished herself in the first battle. Well done!"

Mademoiselle tossed her head royally and wiped the tears away with one dirty fist. "It was natural, because I am French, you know," she remarked. Her father laughed again.

"But it is evident," she continued, "that I must be true to my word."

"You said he was a spy."

"Pardon, monsieur," broke in Tom; "Mademoiselle was mistaken; I am not a spy."

"If you are, you are young for the trade. Pray, how did you get here?"

Tom repeated the story, in his best French. M. de la Bourdonier listened attentively, asking one or two questions; meanwhile the little girl crept up to her father and took his hand; they were a queerly assorted group. When he told how he had taken the sugar-cane, Tom blushed and felt uneasy; but he did not try to evade the matter. "I was very hungry," he explained, "and there was nothing else I could eat. I can pay for it, sir."

"*Chut!*" said the gentleman, "we don't charge anything for sugar-cane."

"And then I got sleepy and dropped off, you know; and then Mademoiselle came."

"And captured you, eh? How did she manage it?"

Tom was n't proud of his part in the assault and capitulation, but he told it all. "Really, sir," he said, "I thought Mademoiselle would shoot me; she looked awfully brave and fierce."

The gentleman's eyes twinkled. "She appears to have relented afterward," he said.

"Indeed, sir, she was very kind; she brought me some bread."

"I stole it," interjected Mademoiselle.

"Worse and worse! And the hen?"

"I shot it, monsieur." She tossed her head defiantly. "It was to eat; I would do it again. However," she added, "I don't think I would skin it again; it's too feathery and juicy." She looked down at her splotched dress and sighed.

"Mademoiselle," said her father, with gravity, "you will oblige me by not taking any more prisoners; the results are ruinous. And after your prisoners are taken you don't know what to do with them," he added, with a puzzled glance at Tom. "Really, young gentleman, if your story is true, it would be cruel to take you to Fort-de-France."

"Oh, thank you, monsieur!" said Tom fervently. Mademoiselle clapped her hands.

"But then, as I said, we don't know what to do with you."

"As for me," said Mademoiselle, "I have considered with care, and I know exactly what to do with him."

"For example?"

"I shall first make him eat as much as possible," —

"Considering what a boy can do in that line, the thought takes one's breath away!"

Mademoiselle waved the interruption aside. "In conclusion," she said, with her grandest air, "I shall rescue him."

"Shades of Julius Cæsar! And how do you propose to do it?"

"That," said Mademoiselle, "is a question of no importance."

"It may be a trifle important to some people; to me, for instance. Are you aware, mademoiselle, that your scheme is dangerous, if not impracticable?"

Mademoiselle smiled all over, so to speak. "Really dangerous?" she asked.

"I'm afraid so."

"That decides me. I shall certainly rescue him."

"Indeed, sir," exclaimed Tom, "I have no right to ask any more of you or Mademoiselle. I will go away."

"We shall see," said M. de la Bourdonier. "Meanwhile, I heartily concur in the first part of my daughter's programme; you must have food."

"Oh, sir! I am not hungry: not very hungry. I had the sugar-cane and the bread."

"Nonsense! After your experience you could eat the whole of that fowl, and a good dinner on

top of it. But I fancy that our cook will prepare the fowl rather more quickly than you and Mademoiselle. Unfortunately, I cannot take you to the house; there is no one in the family but ourselves, but the servants talk so; if you were seen by them it would be all over the island in a day." He reflected for a moment. "At present, you cannot do better than to remain here; the hands are at work in another part of the plantation, and you will not be disturbed. But we must go to the house for awhile. Mademoiselle, are you prepared to hold that glib tongue of yours?"

"As if I would tell!" said Mademoiselle proudly.

"You will not tell in words, but your eyes and manner are not so much under control. However, we must risk it. Now I will tell you what to do. First you must go back to the house with me, and you must carry the hen to the cook," —

"Nasty, dirty thing! Why not kill another hen?"

"Because cook will naturally want to know why you look like a battlefield."

Mademoiselle regarded her dress disconsolately. "I never thought of that," she said; "what shall I tell the cook?"

"You will tell the exact truth, only not all of it. You will say that you killed the hen" —

"I comprehend!"

"And that you tried to skin it."

"It is truly a remarkable hen."

"Tell her that, too, if you please; fortunately

there will be nothing extraordinary in your story of killing the hen, you are so in the habit of doing unheard-of things. I believe the servants themselves go in fear of their lives."

"Well?"

"You have concluded, on the whole, to let the cook finish your righteous job," —

Mademoiselle's eyes began to sparkle.

"Here I come in. You are going to have the fowl cooked ; together with some other things," —

"Sweet potatoes ! and breadfruit !"

"And you have invited me to a picnic in the woods," —

Mademoiselle fairly danced.

"And I am going," —

Mademoiselle curtsied and danced again.

"There is nothing extraordinary in that, either, because every one knows that I'm your slave, you little whirlwind !"

"It is ravishing !" cried Mademoiselle.

"And — in the character of your slave — I am to carry a huge basket of eatables ; food to stuff a regiment."

"Monsieur, I love you !"

"And nobody will know that there is another guest."

"Enough, monsieur ; I fly to the cook !"

"After that, we shall see."

"Oh, sir ! how can I thank you ?" began poor Tom. "I" — but the sudden revulsion of feeling was too much in his weakened state ; the boy almost sobbed.

"There, there!" said the gentleman; "make yourself easy; it will come out all right."

Mademoiselle was watching Tom gravely, and she looked a little puzzled. "Of course it will come out right," she agreed; "it is fortunate that I captured you. At present you are to remain exactly in this place. I shall not rescue you until you have eaten your dinner. There will be chocolate."

"Thank you, mademoiselle," said Tom; and the little girl trotted off beside her father, hugging the ragged hen and getting more sticky every moment. Out in the cane-field her father lifted her to the saddle before him.

Tom waited; it seemed an interminable period. The afternoon sun shone hotly on the leaves overhead and dropped to the ground in flickering patches; the fern leaves curled a little and looked thirsty; the birds and insects were hiding away. He walked to the edge of the wood, but the cane-field was one glare of light, hot even to look at; so he went back to the stream, where there was a deep pool. It occurred to him that he might take a bath, and he undressed and plunged into the pool. That did him good; he came out glowing, dressed, and spent half an hour trying to remove the mud and burs from his uniform. Finally he loaded the pistol and strapped it to his side.

All the while he was thinking. He was very hungry, for the sugar-cane and bread had only whetted his appetite; but perhaps he thought all the more clearly for that. He thought of home

and his mother ; of Ned, of the old Centaur and the Curieux ; of the Diamond Rock most of all ; whatever else occupied his mind, it always came back to the Diamond. Would his friends guess that he had drifted to Martinique ? If so, would they think he had been captured ? Would they watch for him ?

Clearly, the problem was to get within reach of the Diamond ; it was only a mile from the southern coast of Martinique, and if he could find his way to the coast near it he might swim across during some dark night. But he knew that the southern end of Martinique was rigidly guarded. Besides, he could not tell in what part of the island his wanderings had left him ; he might be quite near the northern end, or on the eastern or western side. He must make his way from this unknown point to some place on the southern coast ; must steal past the patrols and sentinels ; find a canoe if he could, or, if he could not, swim a mile or more at night, in water infested by sharks and swept, as he knew, by strong currents ; and if he came within reach of the Diamond he might be dashed to destruction by the surf. The prospect was gloomy enough ; but Tom was young and hopeful by nature. Above all, he was English, and your real Anglo-Saxon never knows when he is beaten ; that is why Englishmen and Americans generally do come out on top, in war or anything else. Two hours before, he had thought of giving himself up, because he had been driven by sheer hunger ; but a little food and the promise of

more had driven all that out of his head. Surrender? Of course not!

He did not suppose that his new friends would help him much; they were kind, but, after all, they were French, and at war with the English. Even if they did him no active harm, they could not be expected to aid in his escape; it would be too dangerous for themselves. He laughed when he remembered how the little girl had talked of rescuing him; as if she could do anything! They would give him food and let him go; perhaps tell him how to make his way towards the Diamond. But for the rest he must depend on himself.

XVI

ENOUGH TO EAT.

AND then his friends came back ; Mademoiselle in a clean frock, and her father carrying a huge basket from which delicious odors stole to Tom's nostrils. M. de la Bourdonier set the basket down. "I imagine there will be enough," he remarked, with a sigh of relief.

Mademoiselle shook her head doubtfully. "There is the fowl," she said, "and half a roast pig that was left over from yesterday ; and a boiled ham, and eleven potatoes, and three yams, and four cakes of sugar, and chocolate, and a package of guava jelly, and a cocoanut, and a bag of bread ; and that was all I could find in the house, though I searched everywhere. But perhaps it will do." All the time she was dragging things from the basket and spreading them on a flat rock. "And two breadfruits, and seven eggs, and Monsieur my father has a bottle of wine in his pocket. And soup," she added, lifting out a steaming dish ; "and spoons, and snuff, and six sweet cassavas — I forgot those, — and some oranges, but of course they don't count ; and this is *cous-cous* ; and I am sorry, but that was all I could find. It is truly marvelous, but I never

knew our house to be so near starvation. And there are some ears of corn to roast. You are to eat it all immediately ; as for monsieur my father and myself, we had our breakfast hours ago. And napkins, and six biscuits. Now eat. There are nuts and raisins in this bag : and plates and knives and forks."

"Mademoiselle is thorough," said her father dryly, "and she did the foraging. I saw the cook weeping and wringing her hands."

"And a jar of ginger preserves," said Mademoiselle, taking it out.

"The basket was a trifle heavy."

"And a small cheese," said Mademoiselle.

"The suggestion that you should eat alone was thoughtful ; but, really, I think there is enough to go round."

"And salt. And some stuffed peppers ; our cook makes beautiful stuffed peppers, and fortunately a calf had been slaughtered this morning, so there was meat to put in them."

Tom's eyes opened wider and wider, and he could hardly keep his fingers off the good things. Mademoiselle arranged the dishes and surveyed the result with complacency. "You are to eat it immediately," she repeated.

"But" — began Tom.

"*Ciel!* What a misfortune !" exclaimed Mademoiselle.

Tom looked at her in alarm ; he thought he was going to lose his dinner, after all. "What is it ?" he asked.

"I have forgotten the finger-bowls!" said Mademoiselle tragically. Tom stared, and M. de la Bourdonier laughed outright. "Perhaps our guest will pardon the omission," he said; "finger-bowls are not absolutely indispensable when there is a brook beside the dinner-table."

"Finger-bowls," retorted Mademoiselle, "are the true mark of gentility." And she meant what she said: in the West Indies respectability and finger-bowls go together.

Notwithstanding this gap in the table arrangements, it was a very successful dinner. Mademoiselle presided, as a matter of course, and did it like a small queen, with such a comical dignity that Tom was quite lost in admiration; apparently she had forgotten that he was an enemy and a fugitive. "At present," she remarked, "the blockade prevents us from entertaining many strangers; consequently we are all the more pleased when gentlemen of rank and breeding honor us by their presence. Allow me to help you to a little more soup. No? Then a morsel of this fowl. A glass of wine, my father. These are roasted sweet potatoes; I roasted them myself."

"They are excellent," said Tom, with his mouth full.

"Mere colonial fare, of course. Is the cous-cous to your liking? I regret that we did not know you were coming, but you will have to pardon us. A little of the yam? I think you will like that. Do not hesitate to ask for anything on the table. Ah!" said Mademoiselle, "it is truly a luxury to

see how hungry you are! My father, Monsieur will have some more of the fowl, and a stuffed pepper."

M. de la Bourdonier leaned back and chuckled: "You should eat a little yourself, my daughter," he said. But Mademoiselle was far too much occupied filling Tom as full as he could possibly be; she nibbled at a biscuit and sipped her wine daintily, but always with an eye on his plate. "Do you like Martinique?" she asked, by way of making conversation.

"I like this part of it," answered Tom fervently. The picnic seemed quite natural and safe, like any other picnic, "only more so," he thought. Mademoiselle chattered, and her father looked on indulgently, and altogether it was quite a dream of happiness to Tom. He had the sense to eat slowly, and the sugar-cane and bread had strengthened him; so his stomach did not rebel, and his spirits rose with every mouthful.

"I shall now prepare the chocolate," said Mademoiselle; "I often prepare it. But it is proper for gentlemen to make the fire." Tom was more than ready to make the fire, but had n't the least idea of doing it properly. M. de la Bourdonier showed him how to arrange three large stones in a kind of fireplace, and carefully selected some weeds and sticks for kindling — Tom would have piled on anything. The planter had a flint and steel, and the chocolate was soon bubbling over the blaze, Mademoiselle stirring it with a large spoon, and coughing when the smoke got into her throat.

She would not let Tom help her with the chocolate; "but you may wash the cups," she said, patronizingly. So Tom washed the cups, and wondered what his mother would think could she see him.

The chocolate completed his cure. He had never tasted the drink before, for at that time it was not common in England; indeed, chocolate as they make it in the West Indies is still unknown in Europe and the United States; the planter told him that it was a real tonic as well as a most nourishing food. Tom sipped the delicious beverage, and hope grew within him, and he was away up in the clouds with a little French fairy urging him to take a second cup. But he absolutely could n't.

"And now," said the planter, "we must decide what to do."

Tom's clouds melted, and he came to earth with a thump. Mademoiselle laid down the chocolate-pot, looking at her father with interest.

"If you do not imprison me," — began Tom.

"That is decided. You are my daughter's prisoner, and she releases you."

"On parole," said Mademoiselle. "You are not to kill me nor my father until we have rescued you."

"Good gracious, no!" exclaimed Tom.

"After that, of course, you are at liberty to kill us as usual."

"Mademoiselle," protested Tom, "I would n't be mean enough to harm you, not if you had n't

been so kind to me ; — and now ; but I must n't trouble you any more."

"You can't help yourself," said Mademoiselle coolly.

The planter laughed. "On the whole," he said, "Mademoiselle is right ; you can't help being rescued, because you can't rescue yourself."

"You have rescued me if you let me go, sir."

"The French people," said Mademoiselle, "never do things halfway. We have concluded to rescue you thoroughly."

"I might try to reach the Diamond Rock," — faltered Tom.

"You can't," said Mademoiselle. "There are ever so many soldiers along the coast. They would catch you and put you in prison."

"Mademoiselle is right," agreed her father ; "that part of the coast is rigidly watched. You do not even know the way, and if you did, you would be captured long before you could reach the sea."

"I might evade the sentinels, monsieur."

"I don't think it would be possible. But if you could communicate with your friends, they might help you. On a dark night a boat might possibly reach the northern part of the island, where the guard is not so strict."

"Ah !" exclaimed Tom ; "if I could only get a letter to Captain Maurice."

"The proper way," said Mademoiselle, "will be for you to telegraph to him." She meant to

communicate by signaling, with flags or fires, which was called telegraphing in those days; the electric telegraph had not been invented.

"Your plan is more brilliant than feasible," said her father, smiling. Tom smiled, too; of course it could n't be done.

"Anyway," said M. de la Bourdonier, "you cannot remain here. The spot was safe enough to-day, because it is secluded and my people are employed a mile away; but they will return soon, and may be all over the place. You understand why I cannot take you to my house?"

"I will go farther into the woods," said Tom; but his heart sank at the prospect.

"You must go a long way into the woods, but you cannot go alone, and unfortunately I cannot go with you to-day. I have a very faithful and reliable negro servant" —

"Alcide!" exclaimed Mademoiselle, clapping her hands.

"Exactly. Alcide is a capital woodsman and knows how to keep a secret."

"Monsieur," said the little girl, "I am truly proud to be your daughter!"

"I will bring him to this place an hour from now. He will have blankets and provisions for several days" —

"We have barely touched the ham," cried Mademoiselle. "I shall send bread, and plenty of chocolate" —

"Monsieur," said Tom, "I don't know how to thank you!"

"And another fowl, and pepper and salt," said Mademoiselle.

"Better leave the commissary department to me," interposed her father; "to-day you had a fair excuse for stripping the house, but if you did it again, the cook might suspect."

"Ah! I forgot that;" and for a moment Mademoiselle looked crestfallen.

"You must be careful about snakes," observed the planter; "I will bring you a pair of stout leggings." Tom had forgotten the snakes; now he glanced down with a start. "Are they very dangerous?" he asked.

"Don't be alarmed. Of course it is dangerous to be bitten by a fer-de-lance, but the risk of being bitten is very small indeed. It is just as well to be careful, though. Always let Alcide walk first."

"I certainly shall," said Tom.

"And he is sure to search the ground where you camp; then there will really be no danger."

Tom tried to look reassured, but it was difficult. In fact, the fer-de-lance of Martinique and St. Lucia is nearly as bad as the Indian cobra; but strangers always magnify the danger. Considering how densely Martinique is populated, the cases of snake-bite are not at all common; most of them are among the negroes, who go barefooted, sometimes at night, when the snakes are wandering abroad.

The planter went on with his instructions: "Alcide will take you to the centre of the island,

where only a few hunters have penetrated, and you can easily conceal yourselves. After two or three days he must return to get more provisions. Meanwhile, I will try to arrange some means for communicating with your friends on the Diamond Rock ; but it will be difficult, and you may have to wait a long time. You know that fruit-sellers are no longer allowed to cross to the Diamond, so we cannot send a letter that way ; but I hope to find some means."

"The correct way," repeated Mademoiselle, "is to telegraph ;" and they smiled again.

"Understand," said the planter, "there must be no fighting to aid your escape. I am glad to help you, but no French blood must be shed through my acts."

Mademoiselle nodded emphatically. Tom could not help seeing that they were right.

"And if you chance to learn anything about our forts or soldiers, you are to keep the information to yourself." Tom assented again, though rather against his will. During his first wanderings he had dreamed vaguely of spying out the whole island and then leading an English force to its conquest. But he remembered denying that he was a spy, and his benefactors had believed him ; he must stick to his word.

"That is settled, then ; now we must return to the house to make preparations. Mademoiselle, you must bid our friend good-by."

"Eh?" said Mademoiselle.

"It would not be safe for you to come back

here before night. Probably you may meet the young gentleman again, but we cannot be sure."

Mademoiselle's face was as long as a pretty face can be, and her lips were quivering.

"It is for his sake," said her father. He was putting the plates in the basket; Tom helping, with a lump in his throat.

Mademoiselle summoned all her dignity — she had a great deal — and walked bravely up to Tom. "Adieu, monsieur," she said; "may you be happy! and — and you — may kiss my hand — if you please." She extended the small hand, but when Tom was going to raise it to his lips she burst into a hurricane of tears. "It's — it's dreadful!" she sobbed; "you will go back to those b-beastly English — how I hate them! — and — oh, dear! — I want to play with you. Why were you not born French? It is much more respectable if you are French, and we could be friends then."

"I think we are friends as it is," said her father. He did not look stern now, and Tom's heart melted wonderfully as he kissed Mademoiselle's hand; somehow his bitterness against the French was all gone. "You've been awfully good to me, mademoiselle," he said, "and I'm just as grateful as if I were French, and just as much your friend. I shall tell my mother and sisters all about you; my sisters are nice girls too, you know, but not like you; why, you're a — a — I don't know how to say it in French, but in English you're a regular stunner."

Mademoiselle dashed away the tears and smiled divinely. "It must be a beautiful compliment," she observed; "what does it mean?"

"It means — oh, it means a great number of things, but principally it means just regular stunner."

"Re-glaire stu-naire!" repeated Mademoiselle. "It is evident that my first impression was correct; Monsieur is a polished gentleman. Re-glaire stu-naire! How sweet!"

And Mademoiselle went away pacified; pausing at the edge of the wood and waving her hand as she called softly, "adieu, re-glaire stu-naire!"

XVII

ALCIDE

TOM was absolutely bewildered by his good fortune. Only a few hours ago he had crawled out of the woods, a starving fugitive, hoping for nothing except a prison and something to eat. And now : food, strength, friends, bright hopes, dreams of safety and the Diamond Rock ; and all through this queer little French girl, who had first captured him and then turned herself into a beneficent fairy godmother. He could n't think of her without smiling ; but oh, he was a grateful boy ! " And she's mighty wise, too," he reflected ; " most as wise as her father. The way she handled that pistol ! " Tom was so happy that he found himself whistling, until he remembered that it might be dangerous ; so he crept behind some bushes for better concealment, and waited patiently. The sun was low by this time, and it was cool and pleasant near the brook.

After an hour M. de la Bourdonier returned, followed by a negro ; the blackest negro, Tom thought, that he had ever seen. The man wore only a pair of breeches or short trousers, secured by a strap at the waist ; his naked body and long, knotted arms shone as if they had been oiled ; his

face seemed rather dull at first, but it was lighted by pleasant eyes which took in everything at a glance, and yet were not roving. He appeared to be a strong fellow, too, for a great pack was borne without apparent effort. In one hand he carried a cutlass.

"This is Alcide," explained the planter; the negro crossed his arms before his breast, but said nothing. "He has full instructions. To-night you will sleep in a place he knows of, about an hour's walk from here; to-morrow you must go farther, to a valley near the centre of the island, and Alcide will make a hut there where you can live. In three days he must come back for more provisions; you have plenty to last until then."

"It's no use trying to thank you, monsieur," stammered Tom.

"Not necessary; I am glad to help you." The planter began to take things from a basket which he carried. "Here are the leggings; better put them on now. And here is a cap. I suppose you can carry this knapsack; it is not heavy."

"Oh, yes, sir," said Tom.

"There are some shirts and other trifles in it which you may need. I put in paper and pens and a small bottle of ink, in case you wish to write to me. Do you write French?"

"A little; not very well, I'm afraid."

"I shall understand. There is a flask of brandy; in case of sickness, you know."

"Indeed, sir, I do not need it," protested Tom.

"You may. Mademoiselle contributed these chocolate-balls and a chocolate-pot and cup ; Alcide has those."

"Mademoiselle is too good !" exclaimed Tom.

"No ; she is right to do all she can for your comfort, because you are our guest ; besides, it is a pleasure to her. Now I must hurry back." He drew Tom a little to one side : "Alcide is the best woodsman in Martinique, and you can leave all arrangements to him with absolute confidence. He is trustworthy, too ; nothing would induce him to betray your secret. But for the rest, he only obeys orders ; it would be useless to discuss plans with him, and might do harm."

Tom nodded.

"Adieu, then ; may you have a pleasant trip."

"And thank you and Mademoiselle a thousand times !" cried Tom ; but the planter only smiled and waved his hand as he walked back to the cane-field.

"I suppose we must go now," said Tom, with a sigh.

"*Oui, missié,*" answered the negro. He spoke in the curious clipped French, or "patois," used by all Martinique blacks. It is so unlike true French that a stranger might almost take it for a different language ; but Tom had often heard it spoken by fruit-sellers on the Diamond, and he could understand it pretty well. He put on the leggings, but Alcide had to show him how to strap the light knapsack to his shoulders. Then the negro led the way across the stream, avoiding

the path by which Tom had come, and turning into thick bushes. He seemed to know by instinct where the mass was penetrable, and he did not use the cutlass at all ; lifting a vine here, pushing aside a branch there, he advanced quite easily and rapidly, though this was second growth — almost the hardest kind of vegetation to go through. Tom noticed that the man made hardly any noise, and that his movements were deliberate even when they were rapid. Where the tangle was thickest they had to stoop and use their hands ; but in a singularly short time they had passed the thicket and were in open woods, where they could walk without trouble. “No too good fo’ hab clar road,” said Alcide, explaining why he had not cut one in the usual way ; he did not wish to leave a conspicuous trail : “Cut road mek dem go track-a we easy-easy,” he expressed it. I have translated the patois into the negro-English of the neighboring British islands.

After a while they struck a forest path, which took them up a ridge and along its crest for a mile or more. Alcide was walking so rapidly now that Tom had difficulty in keeping up with him ; yet he seemed to be moving slowly. That was because his feet were always lifted and set down softly ; and he never stumbled over roots, though Tom did, frequently. In some subtle way the negro seemed to have changed, as a sailor does when he reaches salt water ; no longer stolid, he was alert, confident ; and Tom felt instinctively that he knew exactly what to do. Some woodsmen

are so : they seem to take on new life in the forest, because it is their element.

The ridge was all the time ascending, for it was really a mountain spur between two deep valleys ; Tom could not see far through the thick foliage, but he could hear the tinkle of a stream below. Presently they began to descend one of the slopes ; it was so steep that Tom had to dig his heels in and hold on by the bushes, and it went down so far that he thought they must be getting near sea-level. But in the end they reached even ground, where a stream danced noisily over the rocks, making little cascades and pools between the fern-covered banks. Following the water for some distance, they came to a beautiful glade, and here Alcide laid down his pack. "We fo' sleep ya*, me go mek one cabarn (bed) wid 'ticks," he explained.

He looked around, and then plunged into a thicket, where Tom heard him hacking with the cutlass ; in a few minutes he returned, dragging a number of long, straight, slender poles — saplings with the tops lopped off. He made several other short trips, always returning with poles ; Tom wondered what they had to do with a bed, but the negro worked on rapidly and confidently. When he had quite a pile of the slender poles, he cut four stouter ones, choosing a particular kind of sapling with some care ; the branches of these were trimmed so that a fork was left, and the poles themselves were cut off two feet below the fork ; this left four short posts, each with a V-shaped fork at the top ; the lower end of each post was

sharpened with the cutlass. The negro now selected a level bit of ground and drove the poles in, so that they formed four corners of an oblong space as large as an ordinary cot-bed ; in driving them he used one of the cut-off ends for a mallet.

Next he found two strong poles and laid them between the forks at the two shorter ends of the oblong ; they rested securely, about a foot above the ground, and Tom began to comprehend that they would be the two ends of the bed. Some of the slender poles were laid lengthwise across the two end pieces, and the negro began to look for cordage.

Glancing about, he walked to a clump of vines by the stream and drew out some of the slender stems ; but they did not satisfy him, breaking when he twisted and strained them. " No good," he said ; " me goin' look fo' mahaut a bit, yes-yes ;" and began to scan the forest again ; it was quite a minute before he emitted a guttural sound of satisfaction and strode rapidly up the valley with his cutlass. Tom followed, curious, until they reached a small tree ; it had smooth bark and large, oddly shaped leaves. " Mahaut," said the negro ; " bes' kin' ob rope ;" and he cut down the tree with a dozen strokes, for the wood was soft. Then he stripped off a long piece of the bark, separating the outer coat from the pale inner part ; this inner portion was what he wanted, and the rest was thrown away. Taking the strip of bark to camp, he laid it on a flat rock and beat it thoroughly with his mallet—the cut-off end of

one of the posts. As he beat, the bark began to separate into thin layers, like whitey-brown paper; when the whole piece had been beaten, he tore off some of the layers and easily divided them into narrow tapes. "Missié no' hab see mahaut?" he asked, noticing how interested Tom was; and he showed the strength of the fibre, which could hardly be broken even when it was split to very fine shreds. "Yo fo' 'trip de 'kin arf de tree an' use um fo' rope w'en 'e hot an' sarf," he explained. "W'en 'e get col' 'e get 'tiff an' dus bus' easy-easy." Putting it more intelligibly, he meant, "You must strip the skin (bark) off the tree and use it for rope when it is warm and soft; when it gets cold it gets stiff and just bursts (breaks) easily." He knotted a number of the strips together, Tom assisting, for he was eager to help.

Then the negro began to tie the slender poles to the end pieces of the bed, binding on one at a time with the mahaut cord, and pulling it very tight. The poles were fastened side by side and close together; if one was crooked or knotty, Alcide rejected it. In ten minutes he had a kind of staging of poles, very even and springy. It was, in fact, a very good bed already, though it did not look like one; but Alcide had a true woodsman's pride in a nice job. "Dis cabarn no too good to me ye'," he said. "'Top lilly bit; lemme see fo' put um 'quare fus'." ("This bed does n't suit me yet. Wait a little; let me see if I can put it right first.")

There were a number of palm-trees growing

near — tall, slender columns, with crowns of great feather-shaped leaves. The negro cut down two of these palms and lopped off their leaves ; it seemed a pity to sacrifice such regal things, but woodsmen are not given to sentiment. The leaves were laid on the pole bed so that the thick mid-ribs were near the sides and the leaflets crossed in the middle. Then Alcide opened the pack, took out a blanket, spread it on the palm-leaves and grinned broadly ; he was a very good-natured negro. Tom tried the bed, and somewhat to his surprise it was very comfortable ; the slender poles bent under the slightest pressure, like a modern spring bed, and the palm-leaves were soft and deliciously fresh. "Me no sati'fy wid um yet," remarked the negro, apologetically ; "but he mus' 'top so fo' te-night ; no hab time fo' bil' fust rate cabarn, hurry-hurry so. Naygur say 'hurry-hurry bird nebber bil' good nes'.' One ting cabarn good fo' ; senake an' udder varmin no able fo' clim' 'pon em tarl-tarl (at all). Mos'y time now fo' bile de charclit (chocolate)," he added ; "me go look 'tick fo' bu'n." ("I'll go and find some sticks to burn.")

Tom jumped up and tried to help Alcide with the fire ; but the negro laughed when he dragged up rotten sticks. "Ah, ah !" he cried ; "whar you go wid dat trash ? You ebber yere (hear) o' dem ketch fiah wid um ? On'y copper-hole one (a sugar-boiling furnace) dus bu'n trash in-a ; he dus semoke vittle too bad ef yo' cook wid um." He cautioned Tom to look out for snakes, which might

be hidden under such rubbish ; Tom dropped the sticks as if they had been hot, but the negro only laughed at his trepidation. Then he showed the middy how to make a fire in the creole fashion.

First he looked for a tree. He rejected several, after hacking the wood and smelling or tasting it, finally choosing one with a rough bark. The trunk was six inches thick, and it took the negro some time to cut it down, for it was very hard ; the wood was dark and had a pungent odor. The tree fell at length with a crash, and the negro cut it in several places, making short logs. Dragging these to the camp, he laid two of them side by side, six or eight inches apart. Next he cut a very short section of the tree-trunk and split it with some difficulty, having only his cutlass, or machete as we should call it now, to work with ; from the darkest wood, near the middle, he detached a number of splinters and laid them between the logs. Then he searched for quite a long time, until he found a rotten branch which was dry and powdery because it had fallen on some bushes and hung clear of the ground ; it was easy to break up this wood with his fingers, and he added some of it to the pile. Finally, from a tiny bag slung at his waist, he produced his tinder-box and flint and steel. The box was a joint of bamboo, plugged at the end and filled with charred rags which had been steeped in saltpetre and dried ; the flint was one which he had picked up in Martinique, and the steel was a broken file. Removing the plug, he held the flint against the

edge of the box and struck it with the file ; a small shower of sparks fell into the tinder. Taking up a bit of the rotten wood, he held it to the tinder and blew on it until the wood was ignited ; then he laid the tiny ember on the pile and blew again ; other pieces caught, and he nursed them together with his hand, blowing more strongly until a little flame shot up, and then a larger flame. The fire would now take care of itself ; Alcide paid no further attention to it, but plugged up his precious box with great care and dropped it in the bag. Tom wondered why he lit the top of his woodpile, instead of the bottom, but he noticed that it burned very well. In fact, with proper material, a fire will burn down better than it will burn up, and it is much less likely to go out. The negro would have used dead and dry wood had he found it ; in the damp forest it is often better to cut down trees, but only an experienced woodsman knows the kinds that will burn.

At Tom's request he made the chocolate ; and with bread and ham it was quite enough, so soon after his huge dinner. Alcide waited respectfully until Tom had finished, and then ate his own supper of dried fish and a yam which he had roasted in the coals. He explained that he had not made a shelter because there was no sign of rain, and at this season the nights were generally fine. Tom was very glad of the clean underclothing which he found in the knapsack. He could not help contrasting this camp with his cheerless nights alone in the forest. The sun had set, and the firelight

danced over tree-trunks and bushes, making strange, flickering shadows all around. He wondered why Alcide had not made a bed for himself; but the negro said it was not worth while for one night; he had merely thrown a few palm-leaves by the fire, put on a shirt and wrapped a tattered blanket about his head and face; then he lay down, with his bare feet close to the coals, and in a few minutes he was snoring lustily. Tom remained awake for a long time, listening to the stream and looking through the branches to where the stars were twinkling; they seemed so far away. Then he wrapped himself closer in his blanket and went to sleep.

XVIII

THE METEOR FLAG

WHEN Tom opened his eyes the negro was standing by his bed with a cup of steaming coffee ; it was dark yet, but the sky was gray overhead and birds were beginning to call from the tree-tops. Tom swallowed the coffee and ran down to the stream for a dip ; the air was sharp, and the water made his teeth chatter ; but he was too English to mind that. While dressing he made an odd discovery. Just above his bathing place the stream rushed down through a rocky cleft and made a little cascade. In the dim light Tom saw something long and dark moving over the wet rocks at the side of the cascade ; at first he thought it was a snake, but a second glance showed him that the long body was composed of many short ones ; he imagined that they might be black frogs, but they did not jump when he threw a stone at them. Not quite daring to investigate the mystery, he called Alcide. "What are they?" asked Tom, pointing.

Alcide grinned, showing all his ivories. "Dat-a one *loche*," he said ; "one kin' o' fish."

"But, Alcide, fishes don't walk on dry land !"

"He can to trabble 'pon top o' wet 'tone ; he

do dat w'en he goin' up de ribber. De lilly fish o' dem no able fo' sewim 'pon top warterfarl, so he trabble 'pon 'tone. Watch-a dis (look at this)!" and he picked up one of the fishes from the rock and showed a kind of sucker on the belly, just behind the head. Tom examined the creature in amazement. It really was a small fish, rather broad and flat, and with a large head. It wriggled from Tom's hand and immediately began to move off, clinging to the stones with its sucker and pushing itself along with its stout fins; presently it crawled into the water and darted off. The fishes kept moving one after another, wriggling along the rocks where they were wet with spray, and always directing their course up stream; sometimes they were two feet from the water. Above the cascade they entered the stream again, but still clung to the rocks where the current was strong. Alcide said they came up the stream every year, going far among the mountains, but eventually returning to the sea. He did not know that they spawn in the salt water. Every year the young fishes — no longer than pins — crowd in to the river mouths, and then the negroes catch them by thousands in fine nets or calabashes. These baby fish are great delicacies; in the British West Indies they are called whitebait; but the true whitebait is an English species.

Tom would have been glad to remain longer in this pleasant camp; but, secluded as the place seemed, he knew there was danger of discovery in it; so he hurriedly munched the sweet cassava-

root which Alcide had roasted for him, and helped arrange the pack. Then they climbed to the ridge again, and followed the path until it joined another, where two ridges came together. In a mountainous country ridges are the natural roads, because they are seldom obstructed by rocks and precipices; consequently, they are very apt to have trails on them, made by men if any pass there, or, if not, by forest animals. The ridges nearly always branch downward, and in descending a trail one may lose his way by getting on a branch ridge; but in ascending there is little danger of this, because the branches turn back. It is like a fork: all the prongs lead to the handle, but the handle may lead to any prong.

In this case they passed from one ridge to another, always ascending, until they suddenly emerged from the forest and found themselves in a tangle of bushes and stiff ferns on a mountain-top. Tom looked to the left and gave a cry of admiration; there was the blue Atlantic! The sun was already high above it, and the water gleamed and sparkled with rollers which looked like tiny ripples, they were so far away; the surf flung itself over rocky points and came and went on the white sand-beaches; there were broad cane-fields and red-tiled plantation houses, and a tiny village, and nearer by the dark forest rolling up the mountain-side. But Tom only glanced at these; his heart was with the sea. And there, right in the offing, was a war-ship under full sail; Tom thought it might be the Centaur. Eagerly

he watched and watched it ; but the vessel was coming towards the island and he could not see the flag. Yet he knew that a war-ship, cruising so near the coast, would have her flag displayed.

"Oh, Alcide !" he cried ; "I cannot see if it is an English ship ; she is head on, and the flag is hidden by the sails."

"Missié wait lilly bit," said Alcide ; "dat bessle go hab fo' t'un roun'. He no able fo' come close de lan' tarl-tarl."

"Yes," said Tom, "she must come up to the wind presently." And in fact, she did turn, moving north ; apparently she was reconnoitring this part of the island. As she wore, Tom watched closely ; he was trembling all over, and the negro was interested because he saw that Tom was.

"There !" exclaimed Tom ; "no, I can't see it yet ; just a moment more !" Suddenly he threw his cap into the air with a shout ; for in that moment he had glimpsed a tiny spot of red — the English flag ! Ah, my boys, it is a brave piece of bunting, that flag, and many a brave heart has beat quicker at sight of it ; Tom's was thumping like a trip-hammer. And I know another flag, all vivid with stripes and stars ; that is a good flag too, just as good as the red one. And they go remarkably well together.

"If I could only signal it !" thought Tom. The ship was too distant, even had he possessed the means of signaling ; he could only gaze at it longingly. Years after, he used to tell the story, always concluding : "And I never knew how I

loved the English flag until I was a fugitive, and saw it from the top of a French mountain."

He could not quite make out if the ship was the Centaur, but thought she was, and afterwards he learned that he was right. He wondered if she would soon return to the station by the Diamond Rock. The Diamond itself was hidden by intervening ridges. To the west, peaks rose beyond peaks, a chaos of mountains, all clothed with forest except a precipice or a knoll here and there; it is said that there are forty mountains in Martinique, though it is quite a small island. But Tom's eyes went back to the ship; he could have watched it for hours, and only tore himself away when Alcide suggested that some hunter might see them if they remained on the open land.

The path was soon lost in the scrubby growth, but Alcide turned confidently westward; he had to cut a way now, and it was half an hour before they reached the forest again and began to descend by another ridge. Tom noticed that the negro, though walking rapidly, was very careful; he avoided rocky places, and if a log lay across the way he looked over it before passing. Once he stopped suddenly and pointed to the root of a tree; "*Sépent*," he whispered. Tom sprang back in horror and looked; at first he could see nothing except crooked vines and roots; but at length he made out a snake, coiled up and looking very ugly.

"He no able fo' bite," said Alcide, "causin he too fa' arf fo' jump. Presen'ly me go ketch *sépent*."

"Catch him!" cried Tom; "kill him, you mean."

"Ketch um fus'; me can kill um easy-easy den," returned Alcide, with a grin. "Wait lilly bit, missié."

Keeping one eye on the snake, and moving very deliberately, the negro cut a sapling, lopped it off just above the first branch, lopped the branch short, and so made a forked stick. Then he took some stout cord from his belt-bag and made a running noose at one end of it. Holding the stick in his right hand and the cord in his left, he approached the snake cautiously, the forked end of the stick advanced. The snake raised its head, opened its ugly jaws and struck at the stick. Alcide drew it back a little, and the snake struck at it again, partly unwinding its coils; this was repeated until the snake had quite unwound itself and was stretched on the ground. A snake cannot leap when it is uncoiled.

"One ting sartin, he no goin' jomp agen in *dis* warl'," said Alcide. Apparently the snake realized this, for it was moving off, when Alcide pinned it to the ground with the forked stick over its neck. The snake writhed and wound itself about the stick and tried vainly to bite; but Alcide slipped the noose over its head and drew it tight. Then, to Tom's horror, he picked the creature up, grasping it just behind the head and letting it twine on his arm; he even opened its jaws with his cutlass and showed its curved fangs.

"Oh, Alcide, kill it, quick!" cried Tom; "it will bite you."

"No able fo' bite no moah," said Alcide, with his very broadest grin. He proceeded to hang the snake up by the string, and was going to leave it so ; he was not naturally cruel, but, like most ignorant persons, he had no conception of animal suffering. Tom protested, and Alcide ended the matter by smashing the snake's head with the cutlass.

"Arl good (all right) ; so me go keep de 'tring now," he said ; and he unknotted it and put it in his bag again. Tom would as soon have thought of carrying the snake's head in his pocket.

For three hours longer they followed a succession of ridges, sometimes ascending, generally going down, and once crossing a ravine. By this time Tom had no idea of direction ; he only knew that the forest was all about them and that there was not a sign of clearing or hut or trail. At length they entered a wide valley, descending until they reached level ground by a stream. It was a larger stream than the one by which they had camped before, and the forest seemed higher, with enormous trees towering into the blue and all curtained with vines. Tom had never imagined such giants.

Alcide said they were now near the centre of the island, and in a place which was difficult to reach because there were precipices nearly all round it ; hunters rarely penetrated to this spot, and he himself had visited it only at long intervals.

"Arl time now fo' miamh (breakfast)," he said ; "w'en dat done me go mek one ranch-a ; mebbe rain a goin' com."

They selected a beautiful spot for their camp ; an open place between great trees, with the stream just below them. Then they made a fire and cooked their breakfast of plantains, rice, and jerked meat, or *boucan* as Alcide called it — beef salted and dried in the sun ; everything was stewed together in a small pot. At first Tom was rather squeamish with the boucan, which was tough and evil-smelling ; but he soon learned to relish it. It is used commonly during forest journeys, because it is more compact than other foods, and easily carried.

After breakfast and the usual cup of chocolate, Alcide proceeded to build a house. He cleared the ground over quite a large space, cutting all the bushes and vines close to the ground, and even grubbing out the stumps ; he left two young trees which were ten feet apart and convenient for his purpose ; had he not found them he would have planted posts. Next he cut a number of long, stout poles — carefully selecting the durable woods — and gathered a quantity of vine-stems for cordage ; he had already noted these vines, which were better than mahaut for his purpose ; the stems were split, easily separating into two portions, and he made several coils of them. It was necessary to secure a ridgepole between the two trees, and this required some management, as it had to be ten feet above the ground. The negro shinned up one tree, and Tom held the pole for him while he lashed it with many windings of the stout vine-stem. Then he dropped to the ground

and climbed the other tree ; Tom could not raise this end of the pole far enough, but the negro drew it up, clinging to the tree with his legs and bare feet until he had tied it fast.

Five poles were slanted on each side so that they rested on the ridge above and the ground below ; they were firmly fixed in the ground and secured to the ridge-pole, Alcide climbing up again and sitting astride while he lashed them. A number of long, slender poles were tied across the inclined ones, and the frame of the house was complete.

The negro proceeded to fell a number of small palm-trees, cutting off the leaves while Tom dragged them to the open space. When he had collected enough palm-leaves, Alcide began to thatch the house ; twisting the leaves around the cross-poles so that they lay one over another above and formed a thick roof ; this took nearly all the afternoon, Tom helping as well as he could. The negro said that the house would last for a year and would be quite dry. A temporary thatch, he explained, could be made by simply laying palm-leaves on the frame ; but it would not keep out the rain very well, and would soon wither and be useless.

Alcide surpassed himself in making Tom's bed. He split up several palm-trunks, removing the pith, until he had a great number of strips of the hard outer wood ; these were nearly flat, thin, perfectly straight, and as smooth as if they had been planed. The forked posts and cross-pieces were

arranged as at the first camp ; but for the surface of the bed the palm-strips were lashed side by side and close together. When it was finished it was as level and almost as smooth as the Centaur's decks, and a great deal easier to lie on, because the strips were springy. Palm-leaves were laid on the top, and Tom declared, truthfully, that he had never seen so comfortable a bed. Alcide grinned his broadest grin at this praise, and proceeded to make a pole bed for himself, outside the house and sheltered only by a few palm-leaves slanting over it. The provisions and blankets were hung on poles, and there was plenty of dry fire-wood. By sunset the camp was quite homelike and cozy, with a bubbling pot swinging over the fire, and even a small bench, made of palm-strips, where Tom could sit and eat his supper.

XIX

CAN IT BE DONE?

IT had been arranged that Alcide should return for provisions, so he started early next morning, leaving Tom alone in the camp, with plenty of bread and chocolate, and his breakfast simmering over the fire. This was Tom's first real venture in cooking, and it occupied him pretty fully; in fact, he hardly took his eyes off the pot, adding water from time to time as the negro had instructed him, and putting in the rice last of all. There was a moment of great anxiety when he tasted the mess with his wooden spoon, as he had seen Alcide do; it was excellent, and he lifted the pot from the fire with a sigh of relief. But when he had eaten it, and washed the plate and pot in the stream, he began to see what a secluded spot the camp was. A tropical forest is the weirdest and loneliest place in the world except when you have something to do; then you forget all about it.

He strolled a little way into the surrounding thickets, treading gingerly for fear of snakes, and catching his breath when a twig snapped. How big the trees were! There was one giant, spreading its branches clear over the rest of the forest,

and its trunk was not a single column, but a huge cluster of mighty stems, all twisted and grown together as if fifty trees were joined. It was a "strangler-tree," or "Scotch attorney," as they call it in the British islands; and, like others of its kind, it had a curious history, though Tom did not know it. Years before — hundreds of years, perhaps — its seed had been lodged, not in the ground, but high up on the branches of some forest monarch. The little shrub that sprang from this seed had let down long roots, like cords, perhaps sixty feet to the ground; getting a firm hold there, the cord roots gathered strength and bulk until they were wooden ropes, and then cables, and then great columns. The shrub sucked moisture through the roots and grew to a tree, letting down more roots to make other ropes and cables, until the tree on which the seed had lodged was surrounded by growing columns. They grew until they grew into each other and the shrub was a vast spread of green boughs; they pressed closer to the tree which had first sheltered them; they hugged it tighter in new roots, crowding and squeezing and strangling the old trunk, until it died and rotted away and was lost. Then the murderer-tree stood triumphant in its place, a monument of selfishness. The woodsmen hate these stranglers; not that they care much for the valuable timber-trees that are killed, but because it is natural to despise meanness, even in a plant. Like most successful scoundrels, the strangler is worthless in itself; its wood has no value, and it yields no precious drug

nor fibre nor fruit ; even its flower is a poor, sticky thing, with an evil odor.

There were tree-loving plants growing on the branches overhead : ferns in great masses, stiff-leaved bromelias, like pineapple plants, and the broad, green shields of arums ; these were content to profit by their host without killing it. Once Tom saw a spray of golden flowers springing from a bunch of short leaves which did not look like leaves at all ; they were orchids and, glorious as they were, he hardly detected them in the tangle. He wondered why there were not more flowers, for he had imagined that these West Indian woods were full of them. In fact, there were plenty, but generally on top of the forest, out of sight. Standing inside a house, you do not see the roof-tiles, nor a cat which may be walking over them. Just so in the forest : you do not know what is glowing and moving overhead. Tom heard the birds sometimes, and a humming-bird hovered before the orchid flowers and was off like a flash of light. This was in the morning ; by noon everything was intensely still ; even the murmur of the stream sounded sleepy.

Tom sat down on his palm-lath bench, and thought. It really was a lonesome place, and perhaps that tended to make him anxious. True, he had faith that Alcide would return, that M. de la Bourdonier was thinking and planning for him ; he was hopeful that a way of escape would eventually be found ; but it might be a long time ahead, and meanwhile he would have to hide in

the woods, perhaps risking discovery. It was the inaction that worried him : the hardest thing in the world to do is to wait. His thoughts returned persistently to the Diamond Rock : so near and yet so far removed. If he could only let his friends know !

What a queer, saucy little craft Mademoiselle was ; forever darting into absurd positions and firing unexpected shots, and all as confidently as an eighty-gun ship. "But she *is* a regular stunner — for a girl," — thought Tom ; and he laughed again, remembering how she had pronounced the words. "And she's got sense, too ; only you can never know whether she's going to be wonderfully wise or wonderfully ridiculous. She said in a minute that the soldiers would catch me if I tried to reach the shore across from the Diamond ; her father thought so too, and he ought to know. She was right there : but how silly to talk of telegraphing ; as if I could ! I only wish I had the chance, though."

What if he could make the chance ?

The thought startled him. Captain Maurice's flag-telegraph code was known to half a dozen persons on the Diamond, and Tom was rather vain of his proficiency in it. True, he had never thought of it except as a means of talking from one ship to another, or from the Diamond to a ship ; but there was no reason why it should not be used from Martinique to the Diamond. Any red cloth, or even a white one — a handkerchief — would do for a flag. And if he could get on

one of the hills at the southern end of Martinique, facing the Diamond, he could talk across to his friends ; yes, even if he were several miles away from them. Tom sprang up and walked about excitedly ; surely, there must be some way to arrange it. He would go and talk with the planter ; but he could not do that until Alcide returned ; why did n't they think of it before ? It was astonishing that they had laughed at Mademoiselle's notion ; Tom had only remembered it as one of the little girl's random shots, yet she had hit the mark after all, or Tom thought she had, and his vanity came down a peg or two. " Probably she did n't know what she was talking about," he said to himself ; and then he felt cheaper than ever, because he was not snob enough to like his own snobbishness. " No, hang it all !" he exclaimed ; " it was her notion, and she's a little brick, and I was a booby." Whereat he felt better at once, and knew that he was n't a booby.

Tom was so sanguine that he was on fire to be up and doing ; the forced waiting was dreadful. In his eagerness to talk with M. de la Bourdonier he even started through the forest, with some wild notion of going back alone. He lost the trail in a few minutes, and came near losing himself on the steep hillside ; but by descending, he found the stream and it guided him back to the camp. This sobered him a little, and he remembered that it was time to get supper : it is a curious thing that supper will not get itself, even when our heads are full of grand schemes, but perhaps

it is just as well. Tom filled the pot at the stream, and put in the proper allowance of boucan and vegetables ; but he stirred some gorgeous air-castles into that stew, and it didn't taste the worse for them. When night came, he piled a dozen logs on the fire and sat watching the flames for a long time ; they were so like signals. Even when he lay down, his brain was busy spelling out words with imaginary flags and reading imaginary answers, until he flagged himself into dreamland.

It was the same next morning. After his dip in the stream and his coffee, he had only the breakfast to look after, and he had learned by this time that a pot will simmer without constant attention ; so he paced up and down, glancing at the sun every moment and wondering why Alcide did not come. It was high noon and Tom had eaten his breakfast before he heard the crackling of twigs on the hillside ; and when Alcide appeared M. de la Bourdonier and Mademoiselle were with him. Tom was astonished.

"Ah !" said the planter cordially ; "glad to find you safe. I came to hold a council of war with you."

"And I," said Mademoiselle, "came to advise." She wore her usual white dress and great boots, with a little game-bag hanging from one shoulder ; and she was as imperturbable as ever, taking it quite as a matter of course that she should be there, though she had bidden a tearful good-by only three days before.

"Exactly," said her father, smiling; "she came to advise, or to superintend, as the case may be. The fact is, I thought it safer to bring Mademoiselle than to leave her at home; she might talk in her sleep, you know, and the servants have quick ears."

"She must be awfully tired!" exclaimed Tom; "did she walk all that distance?"

"We rode to a charcoal-pit which is only three or four miles from here; it is a better route than yours, but too much frequented to be safe for a fugitive, so I sent you through the woods. We had two grooms with us as far as the pit, and they went back with the horses after we had breakfasted."

"Won't they suspect something, monsieur?"

"Why should they? They thought it was a shooting trip. I generally take Alcide with me to the woods, and Mademoiselle has often been my companion; it is queer sport for a little girl, but she likes it, and I like to have her with me."

"The last time, I shot an agouti," said Mademoiselle. "Alcide carries my gun for me." Tom had noticed that both the planter and Alcide had brought guns—the heavy pieces used in those times for shooting small game—and he did not wonder that Mademoiselle required a bearer. The negro had laid down a heavy pack.

"It is a very good camp," approved Mademoiselle. "I shall now go to the stream to make my toilet; when I return we shall have chocolate;" and she marched off, with a towel and a piece of

soap which she had extracted from the bag. The planter laughed. "She can take care of herself as well as any grown person," he remarked. "At first I used to have a maid for her on these shooting trips; but the maid was always a nuisance, and Mademoiselle soon learned to do quite as well without her. I must order another ranch built; that will keep Alcide occupied while we talk things over," he added in a low voice. Tom understood that it would not be wise to discuss plans in the presence of the negro; so he put off the announcement of his great scheme.

Presently Mademoiselle returned, rosy with cold water, and with her hair all wet. She plunged at once into camp business, marking out a spot for her own bedroom and talking to Alcide. "Remember," she said impressively, "I wish to have the roof very well made; not too high, but high enough. The room is to be partly walled in with palm-leaves, but make it open in front of the bed, because I like to watch the fire. The bed is to be as high as my knees, with a small floor of palm-slats in front of it for my feet, and some pegs for my clothes. But you are to make chocolate before you begin the ranch." Alcide made the chocolate accordingly. He regarded Mademoiselle with a mixture of affection and awe that was very funny.

XX

A COUNCIL OF WAR

AFTER drinking the chocolate they strolled away, leaving Alcide to complete the camp arrangements. M. de la Bourdonier was smoking one of those long, slender cigars, which were common, even then, in the West Indies, though snuff was the fashionable form of tobacco. When they had seated themselves on a great rock, he puffed silently for a moment. "Well," he said at length, "I have some rather unpleasant news."

"And I," put in Mademoiselle, "have some excellent news."

"Eh?" questioned her father, in evident surprise.

"And I," exclaimed Tom, "have such a splendid plan!"

M. de la Bourdonier smiled. "We shall come to plans presently," he interposed; "but we must talk over the situation now. The first thing in a council of war is to make the position clear."

Mademoiselle nodded sagely. Tom colored, but curbed his eagerness.

"You can stay in the woods and be pretty safe for a long time; nobody knows of your being here except Mademoiselle and me, and Alcide, who

can be trusted. But, of course, you want to get away from the island as soon as you can."

"Of course, sir," said Tom.

"And we shall help you all we can. Now, I might take you to the governor and intercede with him."

Tom's face fell.

"I know M. Villaret-Joyeuse, and I am sure he would not treat you harshly; he might even release you at once, without parole, because you are only a young midshipman. But we cannot be sure of that. You are not really a spy; perhaps not even a spy technically, as you wear your proper uniform; but people might regard you as one, because you are concealed on the island. And just now feeling against the English is very strong. In fact, though the governor, personally, might wish to release you, he would have to consider public opinion. I am inclined to think that he would prefer having nothing to do with the matter; it might embarrass him. So the best thing we can do for all parties is to get you away quietly if we can."

Tom breathed more freely.

"It is a great deal better to rescue you," put in Mademoiselle. "Besides, it is more interesting."

"Of course, you must escape from some point on the coast; and the coast country is full of plantations and villages which you would have to pass. And after you have reached the sea you can do nothing unless your friends have a boat to

meet you ; I should not be able to send off a boat myself."

"If I could get near the Diamond Rock," — began Tom.

"I have carefully examined the whole southern coast of the island ; I rode down there yesterday. It is rigidly guarded. All intercourse with the Diamond has been forbidden, because it is known that the English obtained information from the fruit-sellers ; they used it, for example, when they cut out the Curieux."

Tom remembered that extremely well.

"Guards have been set all along the coast ; where there is n't a battery there are sentinels, day and night. I tell you an English cat could n't get through that line."

Tom's air-castles began to melt. "Is the south coast guarded everywhere?" he asked.

"Every inch of it, where it is possible to approach the sea. In some places the mountains come down to the water in precipices, and of course they break the line ; but that would n't help you, because you cannot descend a precipice."

"But" — began Tom.

"I have not made my report yet," said Made-moiselle.

"Ah !" said her father, puffing his cigar, "I was not aware that you had a report. The council of war is all attention."

"I have the honor to report," — began Made-moiselle : Tom smiled, and the planter's eyes twinkled.

"You may laugh, but it is a very good report," pouted Mademoiselle; "I have discovered that the coast beyond Petit-Robert is very poorly guarded; anybody could get through there."

"How did you learn that, *petite*?" asked her father.

"Having resolved to examine the French positions," —

"Pardon!" interrupted her father. "A young lady of ten is rather an extraordinary person to conduct a military reconnoissance."

Mademoiselle's eyes flashed. "Monsieur," she retorted, "I am nearly eleven."

"Ah!" said her father quietly; "at eleven, it seems, one is permitted to forget that one is a young lady."

The bombast exploded instantly, and Mademoiselle was in her father's arms. "But no!" she sobbed; "I went riding; one may go riding, is it not true? Yourself, my father, you gave me permission to ride; and the horse is my own. My father, it is exact that I went riding, and the groom went with me. I was exceedingly discreet."

"That is better," said her father; "let us know just what you saw. You rode toward Galeon Bay?"

"At Petit-Robert there was a post of soldiers by the road, and a sentinel. The sentinel held his musket across, so. Then I demanded to pass. Then the sentinel called a corporal, and the corporal called the lieutenant, and the lieutenant came. He was a small lieutenant, not nearly as

large as the sentinel, but he had a nice uniform and he was very polite. I told him that I wished to go to the beach."

"Did you explain why you were so anxious to visit the beach?" asked M. de la Bourdonier, a little anxiously.

"Of course not. I said very little. But the lieutenant said a great deal. And I listened."

"Indeed!" said the planter dryly; "it was a commendable and novel phase of your character; you generally do the talking. Well, what did the lieutenant say?"

"First he said: 'I beg pardon, mademoiselle, but it is not permitted to pass without an order.'"

"Quite right; the lieutenant was doing his duty."

"Then I asked him if the road led to Galeon Bay, and he said, Yes, it did, and the bay was only a little way ahead. And he said he supposed I was anxious to go to the bay."

"Which you were."

"I did n't say so; I asked if there were any pretty shells on the beach, and the lieutenant said, Yes, there were millions of shells. So he asked who I was, and the groom told him I was Mademoiselle Lucie de la Bourdonier. Then the lieutenant saluted and said it was a shame to stop me. And then he wrinkled up his forehead, so, as if he were thinking. And then he led my horse a little to one side of the road and began to speak low, so that the soldiers could not hear. And he said there was really no reason why I

should not go to the beach if I wanted to, because there was a path through the bushes, and it was really shorter than the road, only a little rough for riding, and it did not pass the guard-house, and it went to the beach, and there was no sentinel on the path," —

"What stupidity!" exclaimed M. de la Bourdonier; "the lieutenant ought to be cashiered."

"I thought so, too," said Mademoiselle sweetly; "but I did n't tell the lieutenant. So he said he would show me the path. And I said that would be too much trouble, and he said, No, it would be a pleasure, and he was anxious to have me see the path, because it was never guarded and it would be convenient for me in case I wished to go to the beach again; and I said, Yes, it would. So the lieutenant went with me, and the groom rode behind, and the lieutenant was extremely polite, and he explained everything to me and said I could always use the path, even if he was not at the post, because the path was hidden in bushes and the soldiers would never notice me. And he was careful to tell me just how far I could go on the beach. He said it would not be wise to go beyond the bay, because there were more soldiers at Trinité and they might see me. And he said I need pay no attention to negroes if I met them, because they were fishermen who were allowed to go to Galeon Bay. So I asked if they went there often, and he said they generally went every day to fish, and they had canoes there. And when he saw how interested I was in the fishermen, he said they

often went at night, when the tide was convenient for them; and I asked, How convenient? And he said the best fishing was when the tide began to flow, and the fishermen never went except an hour before the end of the ebb-tide, which was a little later every night because of the moon," —

"Was the jackass of a lieutenant trying to show exactly how any one could pass at night without discovery?"

"No, monsieur," said Mademoiselle; "he was n't trying to; but he did. And he said the fishermen generally stayed about three hours and then came back. I asked if there were any houses near the beach, and the lieutenant said, No, there were none until after the road passed Galeon Bay. And when we got to the end of the path, where it comes out on the beach, the lieutenant showed me where Caravelle Point was, and he said he advised me not to go beyond the sand beach. And I thanked him; and he said, Not at all, he was overjoyed to show any attention to a daughter of M. de la Bourdonier. And he said, 'Mademoiselle, if you come here again, use this path until you come to the beach road;' and he said it would be better not to come between ten and eleven o'clock in the morning, because a patrol passed at that hour and I might meet it. I asked if there were any other patrols, and he said, Yes, but they were not likely to trouble me, because one was at six o'clock in the morning, and another just before sunset, and at nine o'clock and three o'clock during the night. And he asked if there

was anything else he could tell me, and I said, No, thank you, monsieur, because you have already told everything that can possibly be of use to me," —

"He certainly had!" chuckled M. de la Bourdonier.

"So he went back, and I rode along the beach with the groom, and the groom picked up some shells for me; they were beautiful shells. And the beach was exactly as the lieutenant had told me; there were some negroes fishing, but they were not at all surprised to see me, because they supposed I had come by the guard-house and had a pass. When I rode back, the lieutenant was waiting again at the end of the path, and he said, 'Pardon, mademoiselle, but I forgot to mention one thing;' so I asked what it was, and the lieutenant said it would always be safe for me to come to the beach, because hardly anybody went there, and even if people did see me, nobody could suppose that a little lady was doing any harm, and I could say I had come by the path. And he said, 'If, by chance, anybody does annoy you, mademoiselle, you must demand to be conducted to the guard-house, and to speak to Lieutenant Cartouche, who will always be at your service.' And then the lieutenant bowed very low, with one hand holding his hat and the other laid on his heart, so; and he wished me good-day, and I said, Thank you, monsieur; and that was all. Truly, my father," concluded Mademoiselle tearfully, "I was very discreet indeed. And you

will see for yourself that I could not avoid making the reconnoissance without being impolite to the lieutenant."

M. de la Bourdonier looked at her with an odd little smile. "Mademoiselle," said he, "your powers of persuasion were sufficiently shown by the fate of the lieutenant. If you try them on me I may forget myself and acknowledge that you are adorable."

Mademoiselle beamed. "She is a regular stunner," thought Tom. "And her father knows exactly how to manage her, too," he added to himself.

The planter reflected. "Well, *petite*," he said, "the information is valuable. I knew, in a general way, that that part of the coast was not so rigidly guarded. I suppose our young friend could get to Galeon Bay, but that would do no good unless there was an English boat there to meet him ; even if he took one of the fishermen's canoes, he could hardly escape without discovery. We must try to get a message to the Diamond Rock, or to one of the English ships ; but that is almost as difficult as escaping to them. I shall do all I can, and we must be patient."

XXI

A GREAT PLAN

"If we could get a message to the Diamond Rock, they could send a boat to take me off!" exclaimed Tom.

M. de la Bourdonier looked sorry. "I'm afraid it is a very large if," he said.

"Could I get where I could see the Diamond?" asked Tom eagerly.

"Why, yes; that would be easy enough."

"Within two or three miles of there?" Tom was breathing hard now; his hopes were rising.

"That would be more difficult," returned the planter. "Still, it might be possible. But what good would it do you?"

"Monsieur," — began Tom earnestly; then he paused. "It is n't my idea, exactly," he continued; "Mademoiselle said we ought to telegraph."

"Well," said M. de la Bourdonier, smiling; "but we can't telegraph, you see."

Mademoiselle had sprung up. "It's the only possible way!" she exclaimed. "You have found out how to telegraph; my idea was silly because I did n't know how. Oh, I could hug you! It's magnificent!" and she clapped her hands and

danced all over the rock, and sat down again suddenly. "Now tell about it!" she commanded.

M. de la Bourdonier looked puzzled, but very much interested. "Do you understand the naval flag-code?" he asked.

"Oh, it's ever so much better than that!" cried Tom.

Mademoiselle hugged herself in ecstasy.

"Better than the flag-code?" questioned her father.

"It's a kind of flag-code, you know, but different; only one flag. You don't have to fly a whole string of flags and then read them off in a book, but you wave one flag in a certain way, and they know what it means," —

"And then they come with a boat!" exclaimed Mademoiselle; "and you are rescued! It's sublime!"

"Gently, *petite*," interposed her father; "let us understand this thing clearly. It is a system of signaling by waving one flag?"

"In a certain way for each letter, and you spell out words. Captain Maurice invented it; the commandant of the Diamond, you know."

"I have heard of these flag-waving codes; they are said to be slow, but convenient at times. So Captain Maurice invented a system? And do you understand it?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur. All the midshipmen on the Diamond and the Centaur know it. We used to talk to each other with the flags nearly every day; it's such fun!"

Mademoiselle was clasping and unclasping her hands ; she fairly gleamed with eagerness.

"And you think you could signal to the Diamond?" asked the planter.

"Monsieur," said Tom, "if I were within three miles of the Diamond, where they could see me, and if I had a red flag, or even a handkerchief, I could talk to my friends."

"There!" cried Mademoiselle. Her father was almost as much moved as she was, and the stern lines of his face relaxed. "You did well to speak of this," he said.

"It was Mademoiselle's plan," put in Tom hastily ; he did n't feel at all snobbish now.

Mademoiselle dismissed herself with an airy gesture. "We shall commence immediately," she declared ; "what are you going to signal?"

"I believe your plan may be a good one," continued M. de la Bourdonier ; "but we must consider every step. There are difficulties."

"The flag must be red," said Mademoiselle, emphatically. "I shall give you the cook's blanket ; it is exceedingly red."

"How far can these flag-signals be distinguished?" asked M. de la Bourdonier.

"We signaled five miles once," answered Tom, "but not very well ; with telescopes, I mean. Generally we practiced at two or three miles. I can read the flag at two miles without a telescope."

"I have a very good telescope ; you could use it."

"That would be splendid, sir."

"There is the Morne Sec," said the planter, thoughtfully. "It is a steep hill, on the south coast, not more than two miles from the Diamond, I should think. The Morne Sec might do for your signal station, if you could get there. Of course, there are other hills which could be reached more easily; but I fear they are too far back."

"As for me," put in Mademoiselle, "I am of opinion that you should telegraph at five miles. You must certainly have a telescope."

"Well," said Tom, "I could signal at five miles if necessary."

M. de la Bourdonier shook his head. "You forget that your friends are not looking for your flag," he said. "If their telescopes were pointed at you, they might read your signals at five miles, or even more; but before they can do that they must see the flag. Now, a flag five miles away is a very small object; too small to be noticed by one who is not looking for it. Yours must be conspicuous enough to command attention; once you have that, the rest will be comparatively easy."

"Ah!" said Tom, "I did n't think of that."

"You might have a very large flag," suggested Mademoiselle; "as large as a house."

"A large flag could not be managed," said her father, smiling; "and if it could, it would be too apt to attract attention where you do not want it; of course, your signal must be seen only by your English friends, not by the French on Martinique. If the French saw it they would not know it was a signal, perhaps, but they would be suspicious."

"That's so," assented Tom. "You think of everything, sir."

Mademoiselle nodded. "In difficult cases you can always depend on Monsieur my father," she said.

"He has had experience enough, getting his daughter out of scrapes," retorted M. de la Bourdonier. "I really think that the Morne Sec will be the best signal station. Nobody goes there, I believe, and the southern side, if you can reach it, will be almost opposite the Diamond."

"I remember the hill," exclaimed Tom; "there is a precipice right up from the sea. It would be a magnificent place for signaling; they could n't help seeing me."

"The question is, how are you to get there?" said M. de la Bourdonier.

"Is it far from here?" asked Tom.

"Oh, it is n't the distance; it's the danger of discovery. You would n't have to pass the coast guard line, because that stops at the precipice; but in order to reach the hill you would have to pass through a settled region, where there are houses and people. Of course *I* could get to the Morne Sec easily, because nobody would suspect me; but I don't understand your signal code, and it would take me a long time to learn it, even if you were willing to explain it to a Frenchman. In short, you must do your own signaling; consequently, we must get you to the Morne Sec."

"With a red flag," added Mademoiselle; "and a telescope. It is an excellent telescope."

"Exactly," said her father, smiling. "We must transport the instruments for signaling, which will be easy; and we must also transport the signaler, which may be difficult."

"If you could just tell me how to get there,"—began Tom; but the planter shook his head good-naturedly. "I understand," he said; "you do not wish to cause me trouble. But you must simply dismiss that notion and trust to my good-will—assisted by Mademoiselle's wisdom," he added, with a twinkle.

Mademoiselle signified by a gesture that her wisdom was entirely at Tom's disposal. M. de la Bourdonier lit another cigar and puffed it thoughtfully.

"Well," he said at length, "I believe that the Morne Sec will do capitally for your signal station; I was on it once, several years ago, but I doubt if five people go there in a year; the place is all rocks and bushes. After passing the settled region there would be five or six miles of forest to go through before you reached the hill itself, and to save time you should have a path cut beforehand. I am going to send Alcide there to-morrow."

Mademoiselle clapped her hands softly.

"He will look for a safe route through the woods, and cut a path up the Morne Sec. I shall tell him to find a point in plain view of the Diamond, but where nobody in Martinique can see him; and it must be near the top of the hill. I could go myself, but Alcide will be better, because if he is seen nobody will pay any attention to

him ; he has a servant's pass and can go anywhere. Alcide will understand that he is to take you to the hill later ; that you wish your friends to see you so that they will know where you are. That will be enough for him to know at present."

"Yes, sir," said Tom. His voice was husky with excitement.

"If Alcide's report is favorable — and I think it will be — we must contrive to get you to the Morne Sec, if only for an hour or two. There are several ways of reaching it from here, but you will have to pass through the settled region in any case. The best and easiest route will be by the road ; but we must manage it so that you will not be observed."

"I might go at night, sir," suggested Tom.

"I don't think that would be wise. The road is patrolled by soldiers every night ; if you met them they would be sure to stop and question you. No ; you must go in the daytime."

"You must be disguised !" cried Mademoiselle. Tom colored.

"The correct disguise will be an old negro woman with one eye, and a basket of oranges on her head. She should have a staff. The gown should be blue."

M. de la Bourdonier laughed. "No doubt it would be an eminently safe disguise," he remarked ; "but I imagine there is an objection to it. What do you say ?" he asked, turning to Tom.

"I — well, sir, of course I could n't make myself into a negro woman," said Tom. "And be-

sides," he added sturdily, "I don't want to be disguised at all."

"Exactly so," said the planter approvingly. "You are a young officer, and honor compels you to wear your uniform, even at the risk of capture."

"Indeed it does, sir," said Tom proudly.

"I know," agreed M. de la Bourdonier; "I have been a soldier myself."

Mademoiselle sprang up with tears in her eyes. "Monsieur," she said to Tom, "I beg your pardon; I did n't think." And she stood like a small culprit awaiting sentence.

"Please don't!" stammered Tom, in great confusion; "there is n't anything to pardon." But he liked Mademoiselle better than ever before. "She's a real little lady," he thought; "and how quick she was to understand." He was intensely relieved, too. Young as Tom was, he knew the unwritten law — strong as iron in those days — that governed military and naval officers. He knew what was due to his uniform; that only a great exigency of the service and orders from his superior could justify him in denying it; and even then with shame.

M. de la Bourdonier glanced kindly at his daughter. He went on: "You must go by daylight, and in your uniform; that is settled. But you are fully justified in escaping observation as much as you can. For example, if we could hide you in a cart I should not hesitate to do it."

"My father," — cried Mademoiselle eagerly;

then she faltered, remembering her recent blunder. "Do officers — is it allowable" —

"Well," said her father, smiling.

"Would it be any disgrace — to go inside of a sugar-hogshead?"

"No," said M. de la Bourdonier, laughing, "it would not be a disgrace. But it would be exceedingly sticky."

"We might wash the hogshead; or put him in a box." Mademoiselle was not quite carried away by her own idea, so she did n't add the accessories.

"And how are we to get him in and out of the box, with a lot of people around? Trust me, my daughter, the simplest and boldest way is the safest. I shall take him in the carriage."

Mademoiselle clapped her hands again.

"But will not people see my uniform?" questioned Tom.

"They will have no opportunity. The carriage is a closed one. You lost your cap, and the one I gave you tells nothing; and you shall have a dust-cloak to throw over your jacket; we often use them here."

"Would n't that be a kind of disguise?" asked Tom doubtfully.

"Not one that you need be ashamed of. Officers frequently wear cloaks to avoid recognition; and your uniform will be there all the same."

"That's so," assented Tom.

"I shall leave my plantation in the carriage, to go to Fort-de-France" —

"With me?" put in Mademoiselle.

Her father reflected for a moment. "Yes, with you," he assented. "It will be better, because if I were going alone it might seem strange to use a carriage instead of riding; but if my daughter accompanies me nobody will wonder."

"Besides," said Mademoiselle, "it is probable that you may need me." Her pertness was coming back.

"The coachman will understand that we are to pick up a friend on the road; he will take you for a French cadet or something of that kind, and at any rate, he will not pay much attention to you if you do not speak before him; you must be careful about that. Once you are inside the carriage you can lean back, and probably nobody will notice you through the window. You can talk as much as you please; the coachman will not hear you when the carriage is moving."

"I shall do most of the talking," observed Mademoiselle.

"That goes without saying," remarked her father; "but be careful what you talk about before the coachman."

"Where shall I meet the carriage?" asked Tom.

"I will arrange that; the farther south the better, because there will be so much less distance on the road. The carriage will take you over the really difficult part of your journey, the settled region; Alcide will meet you at a place within a few hours' walk of the Morne Sec, and he will

guide you there through the woods. Of course, we may change the plan a little."

"It is a beautiful plan," said Mademoiselle; "especially because I am in it."

"There is one other question," said M. de la Bourdonier gravely. "The risk is really very slight, but there must be some risk; we cannot foresee accidents."

"I'm not a bit afraid, sir," protested Tom.

"I don't suppose you are. But possibly we may be stopped and questioned. In that case you must leave everything to me; don't say a word if you can help it."

"I promise that," said Tom.

"I will get you through if I can; but if the worst happens, I shall simply say that you are an English midshipman and that I am taking you to the governor. And in that case I shall do it."

"Yes, sir," said Tom faintly.

"Understand, I shall do this only because it will be the wisest course. If suspicion is aroused, any attempt to explain falsely would only make matters worse; and I could not help you, then, because the false explanation would put me under suspicion, too. The only reasonable explanation would be the true one; that is, as regards your capture; and I should make the rest true by taking you to the governor and telling him the whole story, except our trying to get you off."

"I see, sir," said Tom; but he did n't like the prospect.

"And I," added Mademoiselle, "shall demand your liberty of the governor, because you are my prisoner."

"Perhaps it would n't be a bad idea," said her father. "At any rate, we should intercede, and I don't think the governor would be severe. But you need not worry about it; probably we shall not be stopped at all."

"Monsieur," said Tom very earnestly, "I'd rather give up the plan if it would be dangerous for you."

"Make your mind easy; remember that my protector is going with us."

"Mademoiselle?" questioned Tom dubiously. But Mademoiselle was laughing. "How stupid you are!" she cried; "Monsieur my father means that he would not let me go with him if there were any danger. As if I would n't go anyway!"

"As if Monsieur your father would not be capable of tying you in a chair, you little wildcat! And as if you were not morally certain to get us into a scrape anyway! However, the journey promises to be a tame one — subject to Mademoiselle's amendments." Mademoiselle pouted.

"But if I have to go to the governor?" asked Tom; "would n't it be bad for you then?"

"Well," said the planter quizzically, "it might cost me a new silk frock for Mademoiselle; she would have to give a public reception to celebrate her capture of an English officer."

"How delightful!" cried Mademoiselle. "I might give the reception anyway."

rity. "Of course, I had to offer it to you," she remarked; "but it is better for me to do the shooting; we are much more likely to get something." Tom was not so sure of this, but he was ready to do anything for Mademoiselle. Her father smiled and said nothing as he led the way, Tom bringing up the rear of the procession as gun-bearer.

They walked for a mile or more down the valley, and then ascended a ridge. "We may find agouti feeding," explained M. de la Bourdonier; "it is a pity we have no dogs, but the snakes kill them sooner or later. Now tread carefully," he added in a low voice; "there is a plum-tree." He meant the large forest tree called "hog plum" in the British West Indies; the fruits are greedily devoured by forest animals. Mademoiselle reached for her gun and placed herself beside her father; they advanced cautiously, stooping under the branches; but the ground showed nothing but yellow fruits which had fallen there. Tom was peering upward.

"Maybe the agouti is in the tree," he whispered.

The planter smiled, and Mademoiselle laughed scornfully. "But are you so ignorant?" she cried. "Agoutis never climb trees; only the manicou (opossum) does that. The negroes eat manicou, but it smells — *pheu!*"

"Well, I never saw an agouti," said the discomfited midddy.

"Impossible! Are there then no agoutis in the English forest?"

"No, mademoiselle ; only squirrels and foxes and stoats, and a badger, perhaps."

"What are those?" asked Mademoiselle wonderingly.

"Suppose," said her father, "that our friend were to laugh at you because you do not know what a squirrel is?"

"Then he would serve me right, because I laughed at him," said Mademoiselle promptly. Tom was appeased at once, and gave quite a learned disquisition on squirrels while Mademoiselle picked up some of the yellow fruits and began to suck them, giving one to Tom ; it was sour and puckery, with very little pulp and a very large seed.

They visited another plum-tree, with no better success ; but just as they were leaving it, Mademoiselle caught the gun and fired into a palm-tree. Instantly there was a harsh clamor, and a flock of parrots whirled away, followed by a shot from M. de la Bourdonier's piece. "You hit one!" cried the little girl ; and she darted away to where the bird had fallen, dragging her gun after her. "It's a nice fat parrot," she panted, as she came back with the prize. "It was dead ; I hate to find birds when they're only wounded, it seems so wicked to kill them then. Now we've got something for dinner. They were feeding on the palm-fruits and I just saw them in time."

"Do you eat parrots?" asked Tom, opening his eyes very wide.

"They make excellent stews," said Mademoi-

selle, dropping the parrot in her bag. "I should not have shot at them if they were not good to eat."

"But don't you shoot other birds?"

"Why, of course not; except ducks and pigeons. It would be mean to kill a bird just for nothing. And they're so pretty."

Tom began to think that she was not so blood-thirsty, after all; yet she seemed to enjoy the sport keenly. "I never heard of eating parrots before," he said.

"Because in Europe they are only known as talking birds," remarked the planter; "in the West Indies everybody eats them. There was a missionary here a century ago, Père Labat, who wrote a book about Martinique; he tells of several ways to prepare parrots for eating."

"They are horrible!" exclaimed Mademoiselle. "I hate Père Labat!"

"One way" —

Mademoiselle stuck her fingers in her ears.

— "is to pull out all the feathers while the birds are alive, open their beaks and pour vinegar down their throats, and then wring their necks and roast them."

Mademoiselle was making faces, with her fingers still in her ears, and Tom felt like imitating her.

"Another way is to skin and cook the parrots alive. I agree with Mademoiselle that Père Labat's recipes are horrible, but I very much doubt if he ever used them. He was a strange old fellow."

"I should think so!" said Tom, in disgust.

"Are you through?" asked Mademoiselle; and when her father nodded, laughing, she took her fingers out. "Monsieur is always telling those wretched things from Père Labat," she said indignantly; "he calls them good lessons in humanity, because when Labat tells you to do a thing you are sure not to do it!"

Mademoiselle wanted to walk first, but her father would not let her, fearing snakes; he carried a light wood-knife, using it a little when the growth was thick. They followed the ridge for some distance farther, and the planter shot one more parrot but found no signs of agouti. "However, I mean to see where this trail goes to," he remarked.

"What trail?" asked Tom. Mademoiselle pointed out the cutlass-marks left by some former hunter; a branch lopped off here, a vine there, two or three gashes on a tree-trunk, and so on. Tom would never have noticed these marks, for the cut wood was dark with age and moss; but they were clear enough to a practiced woodsman; M. de la Bourdonier said they must be at least a year old. The trail followed the top of the ridge, which was constantly ascending, until they reached an open mountain-top like that from which Tom had seen the ship. But this mountain was quite in the centre of the island, and not high enough to overlook the coast. On every side was a wild jumble of peaks and ridges and deep valleys, the forest rolling over all. In one place only was a glimpse of blue water.

"Do you know what that is?" asked the planter, pointing to the highest mountain, far in the north; it was rounded in form, and showed nothing particular except a larger space than usual of open land at the top.

"No, sir," answered Tom.

"That is the Morne Pelée, the Bald Mountain; Saint-Pierre is at the foot of it, but you cannot see the town from here. They say Morne Pelée is an old volcano. There is a hollow place near the summit, which may be a crater; I have found sulphur along the sides. But if it is a crater, it must be a very old one: probably the fires were burned out long ago. Still, one does not know. Nearly all these islands have volcanoes on them, and some have thrown out ashes or lava not so very long ago; the one on Guadeloupe, for example, and, they say, in St. Vincent, fifty years back. There are hot springs in Martinique."

Tom thought of this eight years later, when he heard of the great eruption in 1812 in St. Vincent. How could he imagine the frightful disaster of 1902, when this same Morne Pelée flung a whirlwind of fire at Saint-Pierre, killing everybody in the city?

But this story has nothing to do with the volcano, and to Tom it was only a common mountain; he was much more interested in the strip of blue ocean, and was looking for the Diamond Rock. M. de la Bourdonier pointed out its position, southward, but the rock itself was hidden. After a few minutes they went back

along the ridge, and finally descended to the valley again.

They were strolling along near the stream, the planter a little to one side and hidden by a clump of bushes, when Tom saw a small animal in front ; it had slender legs and a sleek, reddish body, looking something like a deer, only it was not nearly so large, and had no horns. Mademoiselle had caught sight of it, and she snatched the gun and fired just as the animal disappeared under the fern-leaves. "I missed it!" she cried regretfully ; "it was an agouti."

At that instant there was another report, and a shout from the planter ; the bushes crackled, and a huge sow broke through, right in front of Mademoiselle ; the creature was gnashing its teeth, as ugly as a sow can be, which is saying a great deal ; and it rushed straight at Mademoiselle's white dress. Her gun was empty, so she raised it like a club in her small hands ; the child was grit to the backbone, but she might as well have tried to beat off a rhinoceros. Tom had grasped his pistol, more by instinct than anything else, and he sprang forward and fired ; the sow rolled over, gnashed its teeth again, and lay quivering. Mademoiselle lowered her gun.

"Thank you," she said, quite coolly ; "it was a fine shot. I could n't have done much with the gun. I should have tried, though ;" and her eyes glinted. Tom was trembling all over.

M. de la Bourdonier was running up with his knife in his hand, but he flung it aside and caught

his daughter in his arms ; then he extended his hand silently to Tom ; the stern face was working, and Tom knew what he meant. Of the three who stood there, the little girl was by far the most self-possessed ; it had all passed so quickly, and the dead animal lay close to her feet.

"It's a splendid hunt !" she cried enthusiastically ; "I never expected anything better than an agouti. Where did the hog come from?"

"It is a wild hog," said her father ; "I knew there were a few in these forests, but this is the first I have seen."

"A wild hog !" exclaimed Mademoiselle and Tom together.

"Not the kind they have in Guiana. This is descended from tame hogs which have run wild. They are vicious creatures, especially a sow with pigs, as this one was. Do you know that you have had a narrow escape, *petite* ? You might have been gored or killed but for this young gentleman's promptness."

Mademoiselle clapped her hands. "What a delightful adventure !" she exclaimed. "The honors of the day belong to you, now ;" and she curtsied to Tom, who was very red. "I'm glad you killed it ; but I should like to find another."

"I should n't like to have you, though," remarked her father. He was examining the dead sow. "It was a clever shot," he said ; "especially with a pistol ; you did well to fire at the shoulder."

"That was only luck," said Tom honestly ;

"all I thought of was to shoot the sow before it could get to Mademoiselle."

"But you said there were pigs," interrupted Mademoiselle; "where are they?"

"There were only two; I shot one before I saw the sow. I suppose she was enraged at losing it."

"But the other pig?"

"It must be around somewhere; it ran towards the stream. Perhaps we can track it. I don't want to leave the poor little thing to starve."

XXIII

NAPOLEON

THEY found the dead pig, and near it M. de la Bourdonier's gun, where he had thrown it down. He loaded and primed it, and they began to search for the other pig, separating a little. Presently, there was a chorus of squeals, and a shout from Mademoiselle.

"Come quick! I've got it!" The pig was making the welkin ring with its outcries; and Mademoiselle was flat in a mud-puddle, with both arms clasped around her captive. "I want to keep it alive!" she gasped. M. de la Bourdonier ripped off his coat and had it over the creature in a moment; Tom helped Mademoiselle to her feet, and she stood, a monument of mud, clapping her hands ecstatically. "I shall call it Napoleon," she announced, without a moment's hesitation.

It occurred to Tom that the name was appropriate, but he did n't say so. The pig was squealing its own opinions inside of the coat.

"The main question," said the planter, "is not what you are going to call it, but what you are going to give it to eat. It's a sucking pig."

"Then we must have some milk."

"All right," said her father, with a comical grimace. "I suppose it must be done."

"Well," pouted Mademoiselle, "I had to catch the pig, did n't I? It was in that corner between the rocks, and I caught it, and it kept slipping out, and I fell down on top of it, and it squealed and squealed. But I did n't let go!" she added proudly.

M. de la Bourdonier laughed. "Allow me to suggest that you retire and scrape yourself. That frock must be heavy."

"I have a clean one in camp," said Mademoiselle carelessly. However, she let Tom scrape off a few pounds of the mud, and washed her hands in the stream. Tom cut some cordage-vines which M. de la Bourdonier pointed out, and the pig was soon trussed securely in the coat, with its head sticking out, proclaiming its woes vociferously.

"It is a little strange that there were only two pigs," remarked the planter; "perhaps others of the litter were killed by snakes. Large hogs are capital snake-fighters; in fact, we sometimes keep them for that, and even if the snakes bite them it seems to do little harm. But young pigs are often killed."

"I don't mean that Napoleon shall be bitten," said Mademoiselle emphatically. "I shall take exceedingly good care of him."

"No doubt you will make him sleep with you, as you did the little monkey I bought. Now we may as well gather up the spoils."

"Two parrots ; and the hog ; and the pig you shot ; and Napoleon," counted Mademoiselle. "It has been a very successful hunt indeed. I wish I had hit the agouti, though."

"Never mind ; we shall have enough for breakfast and dinner ; and as it is, we can only use part of the sow."

They walked over to the dead animal, and the planter proceeded to skin it in part, Tom assisting as well as he could ; some of the best meat was cut off. "It is a pity to leave the rest," said M. de la Bourdonier, "but we have no salt to preserve it, and it would spoil in a day. The pig is really all we can use." Then he knocked out one of the sow's teeth and gave it to Tom, remarking that it would do for a memento. Tom kept that tooth for years.

Cutting some palm-leaves, the planter quickly wove a rough basket in the form of a knapsack, but open at the top ; the meat was packed in this, and he slung it on his back. "I learned to make these baskets in Guiana," he said ; "the Indians there use them constantly, and they can be made in five minutes if you have palms." Tom carried the dead pig, and Mademoiselle took charge of the live one, holding the bundle in her arms as if it were a baby ; the pig squealed occasionally, but had given up struggling.

They were quite ready for breakfast when they reached camp, but the breakfast had to be cooked. M. de la Bourdonier cut off some of the pork and showed Tom how to skewer and broil it on a stick ;

meanwhile he prepared the parrots and cleaned and hung up the pig, and Mademoiselle roasted some cassava. "We like to cook for ourselves sometimes," said the planter. "It is foolish to depend so much on servants; half the pleasure of camp life is lost if everything is done for you." Then he made a little pen and put Napoleon in it. Napoleon charged at the side of the pen and brought up with a somersault, and staggered to his feet and gnashed his jaws. Mademoiselle reached over the pen and scratched Napoleon's back, and Napoleon shook his head and squealed exceedingly. Mademoiselle continued to scratch, and Napoleon humped up his back and grunted. Mademoiselle stopped scratching, and Napoleon looked up and waited; for Napoleon had discovered that it was nice to be scratched.

"I must make some rice soup for him," said Mademoiselle thoughtfully; but her father said it would be better not to feed the pig until near night. So the party sat down to their breakfast of pork-chops and cassava; Mademoiselle, in a clean frock, presiding as usual. Then M. de la Bourdonier announced that he was going to take a stroll alone. "I may not be back until night," he said, "but you young people can get dinner; better keep the pig until to-morrow; you have the parrots and pork, and plenty of vegetables. Don't go far from the camp. *Au revoir, petite;*" and he started up the hillside, carrying his gun and Mademoiselle's little game-bag. Tom wondered where he was going.

They busied themselves for a while about the camp, but Napoleon took a great deal of Mademoiselle's attention. First she brought some water from the stream and washed him; Napoleon shook his head and winked, but made no objection, for he was beginning to like Mademoiselle. Then she dried him with an old sack, and Napoleon grunted and rubbed himself against the sack. Then she dissolved a lump of sugar-cake and offered a spoonful to Napoleon, and Napoleon knocked the spoon out of her hand; so Mademoiselle wet her finger in the sugar-water, and Napoleon tried to swallow the finger, but got only the sweet taste. The process was repeated until Napoleon learned that Mademoiselle's hand meant sweetness, and he would follow it all over the pen. Before two hours had passed, Napoleon was convinced that all good things emanated from Mademoiselle; he would squeal for her when she left the pen, and grunt and wink his eyes when he saw her returning, and submit to be handled as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Tom marveled to see the pig tamed so easily; but Mademoiselle took it quite as a matter of course.

They strolled around the camp a little; Tom pointed out the yellow orchid flowers, and Mademoiselle's sharp eyes detected another orchid on the branch, a white one; but they were forty feet above the ground. "I wish I had them," she said regretfully; "but they are too high."

"Why, I can get them easily enough," said Tom. There was a great vine-stem hanging from

the tree, and he began to ascend this, hand over hand, as he would have climbed a rope ; rather a risky thing to do, had he known it, for he had not tested his ladder, and vine-stems are unreliable. However, this one held, and Tom was as much at home as he would have been in the Centaur's rigging. Mademoiselle clapped her hands ; such climbing was new to her.

Tom threw one leg over the branch and was going to pick the flowers ; but Mademoiselle called to him to pull off the plants entire. He did this with some difficulty, for the roots were very strong ; then he dropped them to the ground, and slid down the vine-stem, feeling that he had distinguished himself. But the little girl merely thanked him and gathered up the orchids. "I shall take them home," she said.

"What for?" asked Tom ; "to plant them?" Cultivated orchids were a rarity in those times, and he had never seen one.

"Don't you know, then? They don't need to be planted. You just tie them up somewhere, and they keep on growing. We have ever so many in our veranda ; the flowers are lovely, and they have such odd shapes." She held up the spray of golden blossoms for Tom's inspection.

"What do they live on, if they are not planted?" asked Tom.

"On the air ; Monsieur my father told me that. The roots are just to hold on by." Mademoiselle's botany did not go beyond that, and, indeed, the science of that time went little farther. It knew

nothing, for instance, of the wonderful relations between the flowers and certain insects, by which orchid life is kept up from year to year. Even now we have many secrets to learn from these strange plants.

The dinner was cooking and Napoleon was squealing lustily in his pen when M. de la Bourdonier returned. "Here is something to stop piggy's mouth," he said, taking a bottle from the bag; "you can cook some of it with rice."

"My father," said Mademoiselle severely, "where did you get this milk?"

"That is my secret."

"It isn't any secret, then; you walked to the plantations. Why, you must have walked a mile beyond the charcoal pit."

"Well," said the planter, "it was in the programme, was n't it? Piggy had to have milk; you said so yourself."

"He is n't piggy; he is Napoleon. And Napoleon could have eaten cassava."

"Then Napoleon would have had the stomachache and squealed all night; I want to sleep. Besides," he added, with a look of comical resignation, "you would n't be happy unless you put your father in some absurd position; it may as well be milkman and pig-keeper as anything else. *La reine le voulait.*"

"The queen wishes you to stop talking nonsense! And the queen says you are just the loveliest father in the whole world, and she's going to kiss you!" which she did delightedly.

“Thank you,” said M. de la Bourdonier; “I’ll get Napoleon a bottle of milk every day on those terms. Now cook his dinner for him; boil the rice in water first.”

Tom ran for the water, and the rice was speedily cooking in the chocolate-pot; when it was quite soft the milk was added, and after the mixture had cooled a little, Mademoiselle proceeded to administer it to Napoleon; Tom standing by to help, and the planter looking on with an amused smile. First she lifted Napoleon from the pen and tried to make him stand in her lap; but Napoleon could get no hoofhold, and objected strongly; so she put him on the ground, and Napoleon stood meditative. The milk was placed before him in a calabash, but Napoleon would n’t look at it. Mademoiselle pushed his head down, and Napoleon squealed and tried to run away. Mademoiselle took him gently but firmly by the ear and soused his nose in the milk, and Napoleon opened his mouth to squeal again, and some of the milk got in his mouth — oh, beatitude! Napoleon needed no more teaching; two feet were in the calabash, and the sound of his guzzling could be heard afar, and his tail wiggled in ecstasy.

“*Bête!*” cried Mademoiselle; “your table manners are disgusting!” and she extracted the pig from the calabash, which Tom had barely saved from being upset. Then Mademoiselle gave Napoleon his first lesson in the usages of polite society. He was made to understand that greediness led to retribution, for his head was instantly dragged out

of the milk ; of course he squealed and kicked, and then Mademoiselle stifled him in a sack. When he bowed to necessity and stopped squealing, the sack was removed, and Napoleon at once thrust his head and a foot into the calabash ; the foot was forcibly taken out, and Napoleon was admonished, but he tried to do it again ; so the calabash was removed altogether, and for five minutes Napoleon was left to consider the evil of his ways. The lesson occupied some time, and a good deal of milk was spilled ; but it is a fact that the pig became visibly less piggish. By the end of the next day he was very well-behaved indeed, and so tame that the pen was no longer necessary ; he would follow Mademoiselle around like a dog, charging down on her with a great show of fierceness, and running off, and stopping suddenly with a queer jerk and a wink, the dearest little pig that ever was seen.

That evening, as they sat round the fire, M. de la Bourdonier spoke of the battle of Valmy, where he had served under Dumouriez. He said little, but his eyes lighted, and Tom could not help thinking that he was a soldier yet in spirit. It puzzled him that a man like that should have walked ten or twelve miles just to get a bottle of milk for a pig. "Of course, it was n't the pig really," thought Tom ; "he wanted to please Mademoiselle. But it's odd, anyway." Perhaps it was ; and perhaps it explained, in part, why Mademoiselle was so ready to obey her father. He never spoke harshly to her ; yet a shadow of disapproval on his grave face would melt all her moods in an instant.

XXIV

GENERAL ORDERS

NEXT morning they went shooting again. "Not that we need meat to-day," said the planter, "but if we get anything it will keep until to-morrow, and the walk will serve to pass time."

They went up the valley, but found no game at first, and amused themselves by gathering the ferns which grew there in abundance. M. de la Bourdonier was something of a botanist, and had sent more than one collection of dried plants to Europe. He showed Tom how the ferns could be distinguished by the arrangement of spores on the back of the leaf; and he pointed out clumps of the beautiful golden fern, which is coated beneath with yellow powder. Once he found a bay-tree and picked some of the fragrant leaves, rubbing them in his hands before he gave them to Tom to smell. Our bay rum is prepared from these leaves.

They were almost back to the camp when Mademoiselle snatched her gun from Tom's hand and fired at a small animal. "It's an agouti," she cried, "and I hit it!" Tom ran to get the animal, which was quite dead; Mademoiselle examined

the shot-holes critically, but made no comment on her own skill.

"It is about the only four-footed game we have," said the planter; "agouti meat is none of the best, but one must not be too particular in the woods." He showed Tom that the jaws were like those of a rabbit or squirrel, with long gnawing teeth in front. Agoutis eat fruits, and live in holes under logs, much as rabbits do.

After breakfast M. de la Bourdonier trudged off cheerfully for another bottle of milk; returning toward nightfall with Alcide, whom he had met on the road. Tom sprang to his feet.

"Alcide has been on the Morne Sec," said M. de la Bourdonier. "It is quite deserted, as I had supposed; and he says there is a place near the top where the Diamond is in plain sight, and very near."

Tom's heart leaped. How could he have been interested in ferns and agoutis?

"I will tell you the rest soon," added the planter, with a warning glance at Alcide. "How is Napoleon, *petite*?"

Mademoiselle's face wore a look of immense gravity and care. "Napoleon has been giving us a great deal of trouble," she said. "We have been making him a suit of clothes. At present he is in the pen."

Tom, who had acted as associate tailor, was grinning.

"Please go and take him out," requested Mademoiselle. There was a faint squeal from the pen,

and Tom went to it, stifling his laughter as well as he could ; Mademoiselle looked as unconscious as a carved cherub.

Napoleon was released ; Mademoiselle whistled, and he galloped up to her and stood revealed.

"Saint Joseph !" yelled Alcide, "wha' dat ?" and he crossed himself in horror, while M. de la Bourdonier threw himself back on the ground and laughed and laughed. Tom was grinning all over, but Mademoiselle's face never flickered. "I think it is a very good suit of clothes," she said.

It was. The breeches, made of a white sack, had literally been sewn on the pig's fat legs, for Mademoiselle never traveled without needle and thread. A blue cooking-bib had furnished the material for the jauntiest of military coats, with tails and all complete ; and to this were attached red epaulets of threads from Mademoiselle's cap. Tom had achieved a stylish cocked hat from the agouti skin, further ornamented with a red tassel and a parrot-feather ; this was firmly tied over the pig's ears. There was a brilliant sash, also derived from the red cap, and a wooden sword which sometimes dragged at Napoleon's side and sometimes tripped him up ; and the tail, sticking out from the breeches, had a red, white, and blue cockade with long streamers. Napoleon seemed quite unconscious of his own glory ; he flirted the cockade and winked amicably, while the spectators roared.

"It is a pity," sighed Mademoiselle, "but we had no yellow facings for the coat, and no brass

buttons. And you will see for yourself how ungraceful it is for an officer to walk on four legs. Sometimes I get almost discouraged."

M. de la Bourdonier stood up and straightened his face while he made a very low bow. "Mademoiselle," he said, "I do homage to your genius. Considering that you caught the pig in the woods" —

"Ah! wha' dat-a? wil' harg? Never did!" ejaculated Alcide. "*Pà pàlé ça, missié.*"

"It was wild only yesterday," cried Tom enthusiastically; "we killed the old sow, and Mademoiselle caught the pig, and she's been taking care of it; and now it's as tame — as tame as I am."

Alcide's face was a study. "Me, I dunno!" he pondered. "Lilly Manmzell 'he manange (manage) fo' 'duce dat goose sewim in-a dat indigarwarter (indigo-water) so tel 'he com' out blue-blue arl ober; an' agen 'he mek cat drunk; an' 'he 'spostulate wid mule tel 'he mek um swaller kaphy (coffee) likes-a he ben use to um sence he barn. As to de darg (dog) me no able fo' tell 'ow 'he mek um holler an' barl (bawl) like-a w'en man heart-a bruk. An' de fool hen an' arl show um wha' he lay he aig so he fin' um easy-easy; dat blark hen, 'he dus larn um fo' lay aig in de bed wha' cook seleep, so de pore ole naygur cuss shockin'. An' dat lilly monkey he lub Manmzell bad-bad fashion (altogether too much) cause he get comb an' shabe (shaved); me nebber see no oder monkey get comb an' shabe. An' yo' see de colt 'pon he knee fo' Manmzell dus like fo' one

holy-body (saint). But dis mek me larf mo' dan arl ; dus to see lilly Manmzell hol' wil' harg, an' tu'n um to one horficer-man. Manmzell mus' be one jumby (witch); dus do arl kin' ob ting."

M. de la Bourdonier laughed again at the reminiscences ; and, strange to say, every one was literally true. The little girl had an almost uncanny power over animals. There are rare instances of this ; I have seen some myself, and it was hard to believe my own eyes. Horse-tamers — the best of them — have this power, and it is the secret of their art. Sometimes it is not even a mutual affection ; animals may avoid those who love them best, and be attracted to cruel men. Mademoiselle liked her pets, but she was not sentimental over them, and she never hesitated to kill game for food.

After a little while they left Alcide and strolled away to the rock ; Napoleon trotting after his mistress as fast as his tight uniform would let him. "If we are going to have another council of war, we may need him," remarked Mademoiselle.

"It is n't so much a council of war as general orders," said the planter. "I am convinced that we can get you to the Morne Sec, and from what Alcide says, it will be an excellent place for signaling to the Diamond. Now listen. To-morrow I shall take Mademoiselle home, and a few hours later you are to go with Alcide to a place I have told him of, near the charcoal pit ; it is not as safe as this valley, but you must risk it for one night ; it is quite close to the carriage-road. Alcide will

leave you for an hour while he goes on to a plantation for a bundle which I will send there ; he will carry it back to you, and you will find a dust-cloak in it. Next morning, early, Alcide will take you to a certain place on the road ; it is a thicket, where you can hide yourself if necessary ; but you must keep a good lookout northward — on your left, as you face the road."

"I understand, sir," said Tom ; his heart was beating fast.

"You must be sure and put on the dust-cloak and wear it so that it will cover your jacket. Alcide will go on, and you may have to wait an hour or two for our carriage ; we shall leave my house early, and should reach you about seven o'clock. When you see a carriage coming from the north, with a handkerchief waving from the window, step out into the road and wave your hand or your cap ; but don't say anything. The coachman will be informed that we are to pick up a friend on the road, so he will stop for you. Then you must get into the carriage quietly, as if it were all understood beforehand."

"What is Alcide going to do ?" asked Tom.

"After he leaves you he will hurry ahead of the carriage to a place agreed upon, where we are to put you down ; he has a servant's pass, so he will not be molested, and it would be dangerous for him to ride with the coachman ; they might talk about you."

"Alcide is faithful," remarked Mademoiselle, "but he would be sure to blunder if the coachman

asked him questions. If nobody sees you with him, nobody will ask questions, and then it will be all right."

"After we set you down," continued the planter, "Alcide will take you through the woods to the foot of the Morne Sec, where you will have to sleep that night. There is water there, but it is not good; Alcide will take enough for drinking and making chocolate. Next morning early you will ascend the Morne Sec; Alcide has a path already cut. We can only give you three or four hours to talk with your friends, so you must waste no time. You must know beforehand precisely what you are going to say, and you must say it as clearly and briefly as possible. We cannot depend on signaling a second time; the risk of going and coming is too great."

"I see that," said Tom.

"To-morrow, after we reach home, I shall ride up to Galeon Bay, to see for myself how things are there."

"You will find it just as I told you," said Mademoiselle.

"I don't doubt it, *petite*; but we cannot be too careful, and I wish to examine the bay. If everything seems safe, you must ask your friends to have a boat there on a certain night and at a certain hour. I will write it all out after I have seen the bay and made the calculations about the tides."

"How shall I get the paper, sir?"

"I will give it to you in the carriage. I could tell

you, but it will be safer to have the instructions written out."

"Then I cannot make mistakes," assented Tom.

"Exactly so. Mademoiselle and I will leave our house for Fort-de-France, picking you up on the road as I told you."

"That will be day after to-morrow morning," said Tom.

"Yes; and day after to-morrow night you will sleep at the foot of the Morne Sec, and climb it the morning after that. As soon as you get the attention of your friends, you must tell them what I have written out for you. If they agree, there will be nothing more for you to say; if they do not agree, they can offer some plan of their own. I shall bring a telescope in the carriage, so you will have no difficulty in reading the signals."

"And I," put in Mademoiselle, "shall bring you the cook's red blanket."

"Better not, *petite*; if you borrowed or stole her blanket, the cook might say awkward things. We don't want anybody to talk about what we do, or even think about it; if they begin to think, they will begin to wonder; and if they wonder, they may grow suspicious."

"Well," protested Mademoiselle, "we want a red flag, don't we? For my part, I never saw anything redder than the cook's blanket."

"Oh, I could use a white cloth if necessary," put in Tom; "a handkerchief, or anything. To be sure, red would be better, because we have always used red flags."

"I have plenty of thin red cloth in the store-room," said the planter; "I will bring some of that. Alcide can cut you a flagstaff in the woods; you must show him what you want."

"A very long flagstaff?" asked Mademoiselle. But Tom assured her that a short one would be better, and he indicated the proper size for a flag.

"Better have plenty of cloth," suggested the planter; "you can tear off what you need. Don't waste time in unimportant signaling," he continued; "and be sure that your friends understand exactly. Leaving your camp at daybreak, you should be on top of the hill by seven o'clock. Can you start on your return by ten? That will give you three hours on the hill, but you may lose an hour before you make your friends see you; say two hours for the flag work. Will that be enough, do you think?"

"Oh, I can signal a great deal in two hours," answered Tom. He was brimming over with hope and excitement; already, in his mind, he saw the Diamond in front of him and the red flag spelling out his escape.

"You must allow for the answers; those will take time. On the whole," said the planter thoughtfully, "it will be better to give you another hour; until eleven o'clock. I will lend you a watch."

"I can guess time very well," said Tom. "We have to stand watches at sea, and that makes us count the hours."

"You will be so interested that you might forget yourself; it is safer to have the watch. Well, after you get through signaling, you must return to the carriage-road; not to the place where you left the carriage, but to another point, nearer to Fort-de-France; Alcide knows where it is, and he has full instructions. You should be at the road by two o'clock in the afternoon, or a little later. The road crosses a bridge there; you must hide by the bridge, or under it — Alcide says there is a good place — and he will leave you, going ahead to meet you again later."

"Shall I have to wait long at the bridge?" asked Tom.

"Not very long. Mademoiselle and I shall sleep at Fort-de-France, and return by the same road, picking you up at the bridge not later than three o'clock; but you should be there some time before, so as to give a start to Alcide; I don't want to catch up with him too soon."

"How shall I know when you come, if I am under the bridge?"

"Mademoiselle will make some excuse for stopping the carriage before we get to the bridge" —

"I shall be collecting ferns to plant," said Mademoiselle instantly. "I often collect ferns, and I shall have a box to put them in, and the coachman must get off to help me because I shall have my silk frock on and I might soil it by digging ferns. He will tie the horses and dig for me."

"That will do capitally," assented her father, smiling; "and at first I collect ferns with you, and

then I stroll along to the bridge to look for more, while you keep the coachman."

"And you go under the bridge to find me," cried Tom; "I see."

"Exactly. And after a few minutes Mademoiselle comes along in the carriage, and I tell Mademoiselle that you are going part way back with us; that will look perfectly natural, and the coachman can't possibly suspect anything, because the bridge is two miles from the place where he saw you last. He will imagine that you have been to some plantation, maybe, and have met us again by accident."

"It's lucky I have you to plan for me," said Tom; "you are so careful, and I should never have thought of all those things."

"Well, a soldier's business is to foresee everything and to take care that the enemy foresees nothing."

"Especially when the enemy does n't know that you are there," added Mademoiselle.

"The enemy will not know unless you act suspiciously. While you are on the road the essential thing is for you to act as if you had every right to be there; as if there were no occasion for you to hide."

"It is certainly the wisest way," said Mademoiselle. "When our dog puts his tail between his legs I know he has been stealing. If he just wagged his tail I should never suspect."

"If anybody sees you in the woods, don't run away or try to hide," continued M. de la Bourdo-

nier ; "they will not imagine anything out of the way. You can wear the dust-cloak until you feel quite safe without it. If people wish you good-day, you can merely bow, or lift your cap."

"And where shall I leave you on the return journey?" asked Tom.

"Near the place where you met us the day before ; Alcide will be waiting there for you, even if he has only half an hour's start of the carriage ; some of these negroes travel nearly as fast as a horse. That is all, I think ; if anything new turns up, I can tell you in the carriage."

"Oh, if I only knew how to thank you!" exclaimed Tom. "I do want to show my gratitude ; but that is n't possible."

"Yes, it is," answered M. de la Bourdonier, quickly ; "you can be kind to some French prisoner, or to a fugitive ; who knows?"

"I promise to do that if I have the chance," said Tom earnestly.

The planter laid his hand on Tom's shoulder. "I want you to remember this," he said. "You are fighting for your country — or for your king, as you would say — and that is right. England is fighting France, unfortunately, and you must do your duty in the war. But if you fight against France, that is no reason for you to hate every Frenchman."

"I could n't hate you, sir!" cried Tom.

"Very well ; and I don't hate you ; why should I? War is bad enough anyway ; don't make it worse."

"And perhaps we may meet after the war," observed Mademoiselle. "That would be delightful."

"I hope we may," said Tom fervently; yet he wondered at himself. For Tom was only beginning to learn the truth which was so grandly worded long after his time: "Above all nations is humanity."

"I like the plan," said Mademoiselle; "only I am sorry we cannot use the cook's blanket. It is such a very superior kind of red."

"That's what the cook thinks," laughed her father. "Consequently, if she missed that blanket she would raise heaven and earth to find it. But I am glad you are satisfied with the rest; it would be dangerous to have you in opposition."

"The really important thing, my father, is to know if Napoleon approves;" and Mademoiselle tickled Napoleon's nose with a twig. Whereat Napoleon bobbed his head most emphatically. Having thus signified his approval, he winked at the applause and trotted beside them to the camp.

XXV

THE CARRIAGE

NEXT morning early M. de la Bourdonier and his daughter started for home ; the planter carrying Napoleon in a sack, much to that hero's discomfiture. Tom would have found the camp lonesome had he been less hopeful and excited ; besides, he had no time for moping. About two hours after noon he started with Alcide, carrying only his blanket and one of the clean shirts which M. de la Bourdonier had lent him, for he felt the importance of looking his best on the trip. Alcide had a small bag of provisions and his cutlass.

They walked for five or six miles, generally on the ridges, and after a while there were signs of nearing civilization ; a beaten path, piles of cut wood, and so on. Once they passed close to the edge of a cane-field where they could hear men working ; but Alcide avoided the field by a circuit, and finally led the way to a tiny clearing in the woods ; there was a stream in this clearing, and a tumble-down hut.

"On'y ol' coal-pit," said Alcide. "Nobody a com' yah no moah. 'Spose one naygur pass an' say *bonjour*', Missié no 'casion fo' 'pond to um." He examined the ranch thoroughly, and even

sounded the thatch with his knife to see if any snakes were concealed in it; he did dislodge a scorpion, which was making off with its tail in the air when the negro cut it in two, with an execration. Tom did not mind scorpions much, for he had seen them on the Diamond.

Then Alcide went away for an hour, and returned with the package and a letter from M. de la Bourdonier; the letter was merely to say that he had arrived safely with Mademoiselle, and Tom noticed that it was neither addressed nor signed. In the package he found a linen cape-cloak, a pair of stockings, and a clothes-brush, which he was very glad to get; he spent an hour brushing the mud from his clothes, though Alcide offered to do it for him; and in the end he felt quite presentable. The negro made a fire and prepared dinner as usual, and if any people passed Tom did not see them. There was a palm-slat bed in the ranch, where he lay awake for a hopeful hour and then slept very comfortably.

Alcide had chocolate and roast cassava ready before dawn, and with the first light they were off again; in half an hour their path came out suddenly on a broad carriage-road. The negro showed Tom where he was to stand, in a clump of bushes, said "*bonjour*", *missiŕ*," and hurried off. Tom had already thrown the dust-cloak over his shoulders, and it concealed his uniform to the knees; he stood a little behind the bushes, where no one would be likely to observe him, and waited impatiently.

A negress with a great tray of cakes on her head — a *porteuse* — came up singing, and he involuntarily shrank back, but stepped forward again, remembering M. de la Bourdonier's instructions; the *porteuse* did not notice him, and passed on. Then came a creaking bullock-cart, with immense wooden wheels, dragging slowly by while the driver shouted at every step; Tom was dreadfully afraid it would block the road for the carriage, but it creaked off in the distance. A gang of negro slaves — workmen from some plantation — went by in the other direction; one of them stopped in front of the thicket to light his tiny cigar, and he noticed Tom; but he hurried on with the usual "*bonjour*", *missiè*." And then came the carriage.

It was a huge, lumbering thing, such as titled or wealthy people used in those days; much like the stage-coaches which you may still see in rural districts, and not a whit more convenient. But to Tom, who had never seen anything better, it was a very fine carriage indeed, especially when a white handkerchief appeared at the window. He stepped out into the road, with his heart thumping, and held up his hand. M. de la Bourdonier looked out of the carriage window, and told the coachman to stop; then he opened the door, alighted, and embraced Tom warmly — much to that young gentleman's surprise, for he was not used to French greetings. Mademoiselle, at the window, extended a small hand to be kissed; Tom had the sense to do that, and to pull off his

cap at the same time; the coachman, from his high seat, looking down with interest.

"Get in! get in!" cried the planter, without giving Tom a chance to speak, had he so far forgotten himself; "I'm glad you kept your appointment."

"*Bonjour, m'sieur,*" said Mademoiselle; "it is well you did not disappoint us. Do come in quick!" Tom was pushed and pulled into the coach, M. de la Bourdonier sprang to his place on the back seat, beside Mademoiselle, and called to the coachman to drive on; in a moment they were rattling down the road, eight miles an hour, the dust flying as the coachman cracked his whip, quite unconscious that he had an English fugitive behind him.

M. de la Bourdonier laughed. "That was capitally done," he said; "if we get over all our difficulties as easily, you will be free in a few days."

"You are careless!" said Mademoiselle severely. "When you kissed my hand your cloak came open, and I observed a brass button; fortunately you raised the cape at the same time, so the coachman could not see. I was afraid of that, so I provided some pins." She proceeded to truss Tom up with pins until he could hardly move his arms; but he was too much astonished to protest. For Mademoiselle was a dainty little creature now, all in pink silk, with a sash, and she had gloves, — but she had taken one off to let Tom kiss the hand, — and she wore a locket, and was

altogether bewitching, and was very well aware of it, too. Tom could hardly believe that this was the little amazon who had faced an angry sow.

"I have been to Galeon Bay," said M. de la Bourdonier; "there could not be a better place for a boat to take you off, and you can get there easily, thanks to that stupid lieutenant. The fishermen do not frequent the bay at night, except sometimes at the beginning of the flood tide, and we can calculate that. Eleven o'clock on Thursday night will do very well; there will be no fishermen then, and the tide will be at the end of the flow, which will help your friends to come in quietly; the patrol will have passed at nine."

"Oh, monsieur!" — began Tom.

"Of course, your friends must not be seen or heard from the shore. There is no moon on Thursday until towards morning, and the darker the night is, the better."

"I hope it will rain," said Mademoiselle.

"Not likely at this season; but it will be dark enough without that. You will have to show a light so that your friends will know precisely where you are. See, I have written it all out on this paper, as briefly as possible, so that you will know what to signal. Better make a copy in English, and then I will destroy this; handwriting tells awkward stories sometimes."

Tom read as follows:—

"Jeudi le 29 germinal à onze heures du soir, vous serez au côté est de l'île, dans la baie du Galeon, au sud de la presqu'île de la Caravelle.

Les anglais devront se tenir dans un bateau à quelque distance de la baie a cette même heure. Quand vous ferez deux signaux en allumant des feux à un intervalle de cinq secondes, le bateau devra entrer dans la baie en se tenant à l'ombre des rochers. Quand il sera bien dans la baie, il devra par deux fois faire voir une petite lueur à un intervalle de cinq secondes. Si vous répondez de la même manière, le bateau devra rapidement aller vers votre lumière et vous prendre à son bord. Si au bout de dix minutes vous n'avez pas répondu à sa lumière, le bateau devra reprendre le large et attendre en dehors de la baie un autre signal ; mais si vous n'allumez qu'un feu, les anglais devront attendre tranquillement dans la baie jusqu'à ce que vous en allumiez deux avec intervalle. S'ils ne voient pas du tout de lumière, ils devront attendre quelque temps quand même pour plus de sûreté ; puis ils pourront s'en retourner au rocher du Diamant. Dans ce cas ils devront être à l'aguet dans l'attente d'autres signaux."

"*Germinal?*" asked Tom doubtfully ; "what date is that in English?"

"Ah!" exclaimed M. de la Bourdonier, in vexation ; "I thought the instructions were quite a marvel of clearness, and here I have blundered in the most important phrase ! Of course, you were not likely to know our French dates." (The "republican calendar," adopted during the French revolution, was still in use in 1804.)

"My father," interposed Mademoiselle, "I know

very well that you never make mistakes. It is the stupidity of the English, who will not adopt French improvements."

"Such as the guillotine, eh? Well, this is a good lesson; many a campaign has been lost by generals who provided for all the small points and forgot one big one." He made a rapid calculation and interlined *Jeudi le 19 Avril*, in the paper. There were several sheets of blank paper with the written one, and M. de la Bourdonier gave Tom a pencil. "Better keep the pencil and the rest of the paper," he said; "you may need them."

Tom translated and wrote down, as well as he could in the jolting carriage:—

"At eleven o'clock on Thursday night, the 19th of April, you will be on the east side of the island, at Galeon Bay, south of Caravelle Peninsula. The English should have a boat off the bay at the same time. When you show a light twice, with an interval of five seconds, the boat must enter the bay, keeping in the shadow of the rocks. When it is well within the bay it must show a small light twice, with an interval of five seconds. If you answer in the same way, the boat must come quickly to your light and take you on board. If you do not answer the light in ten minutes, the boat should return to the offing and wait there for another signal. But if you show the light only once, the English should wait quietly in the bay until you show two lights with an interval. If they see no lights at all, they should wait at least a short time, to make sure, and then return to the Diamond

Rock ; in that case they must keep a watch for other signals."

"I think I will write it again, just as I mean to signal it," said Tom ; "making 'I' for 'you,' you know ; then it will be all ready."

"That is a good idea," assented the planter ; so Tom wrote again :—

"I will be on the east side of the island at eleven o'clock on Thursday night, the 19th of April. I will go to Galeon Bay, just south of the Caravelle Peninsula. If possible, have a boat off the bay at the same time. The officer in charge of the boat must watch for my signal. I will show a light, and after five seconds I will show it again. The boat must then come into the bay, keeping in the shadow of the rocks. When it is well inside, it must show a small light twice with an interval of five seconds. If I answer by showing a light twice in the same manner, the boat must come quickly and take me off. But if I only show my light once, the boat must wait ten minutes and then return to the offing and watch for another signal. If you see no signal, wait as long as you can to make sure, and then give up the enterprise. In that case, keep a lookout for flag-signals from this place."

Tom read this, translating into French. "That is a little longer," said M. de la Bourdonier, "but perhaps it is plainer." He thought a moment and then said : "Better add that if Thursday night is stormy you will be at the same place on Saturday night, the 21st, at one o'clock. Galeon Bay is on the windward side of the island, you know ; it is

sheltered by the peninsula, and generally the sea is smooth enough there ; but with a strong east wind blowing there may be a heavy surf, and you could not embark then."

Tom added to his paper : " If Thursday night is too stormy, I will be at the same place on Saturday night, the 21st, at one o'clock ; light-signals to be the same." He read this also.

" Wait ! " said the planter ; " one o'clock would make it Sunday, the 22d ; we must not risk a mistake."

" I will say two bells in the first dog-watch on Sunday morning," said Tom. " They will understand that perfectly."

M. de la Bourdonier agreed, and Tom scratched out " on Saturday night, the 21st, at one o'clock," and wrote " at two bells in the first dog-watch on Sunday morning, the 22d." Then he read the whole over again, the planter nodding at each sentence. " That will do very well," he said.

" Put it in that the sailors must not have white shirts," said Mademoiselle ; " at night it is ever so much easier to see a man if he has a white shirt."

" Very well thought of," said her father, " there is little danger of detection, but we cannot be too careful."

" The oars could be fixed so that they would not creak in the row-locks," said Tom. " I don't know what you call it in French, but in English we say ' muffled.' "

" *Pour exemple ?* " asked Mademoiselle.

" Generally we fasten tow or something around

the oars. I will put that in, too ;” and he wrote down : “ The crew of the boat should be in dark clothes, and the oars should be muffled.” Meanwhile the planter tore up the French version in his own handwriting, and scattered the bits out of the window.

Mademoiselle looked at the paper thoughtfully. “ I never imagined there would be such a lot of planning to do,” said she. “ It is very hard work, because you have to remember everything ; and it is n’t a bit exciting, either.”

“ Ah !” remarked her father, “ you imagined that campaigns were settled with gunpowder and bayonets ; most people think that. But the real fighting is done before the gunpowder gets to work. And that reminds me that you are commissary-general ; soldiers going into battle should breakfast first.”

“ Oh, I had chocolate !” cried Tom.

“ That will not last you through the day, and you have hard work before you.” Mademoiselle was already trying to drag a basket from beneath the seat, until Tom sprang to her aid. “ I tried to limit her hospitality this time,” said the planter. “ It is an early breakfast hour, but it is better for you to eat in the carriage ; after you leave it, you may be too much occupied. As for ourselves, we shall breakfast at Fort-de-France.”

Tom saw the wisdom of eating while he had time, and he made a capital meal of the good things Mademoiselle had provided. “ The rest of the provisions are for to-night and to-morrow

morning," said M. de la Bourdonier; "you are to take the basket with you when you leave us, and Alcide can sling it on his back in a sack. He will have a large bottle of drinking-water, too, and your blanket." He gave Tom a canteen containing water mixed with a little red wine. "Save that for your climb to-morrow," he said; "you will be glad enough to have it then. There is a box of chocolate-balls in the basket; take some of those, too, when you go up the hill; they are as nourishing as meat, and there is nothing like them for restoring your strength after a hard climb. They are Mademoiselle's contribution."

"And the rest of the things are in this," said Mademoiselle, producing her little game-bag. "I made sure myself that everything was in. There's the red cloth; I suppose it will do, but the cook's blanket is certainly redder; and some string, and a pair of scissors, and needle and thread. I could n't think of anything else. And the telescope, of course. Alcide will carry the bag for you."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Tom; "I should like to carry the bag myself." He would not have parted with it for anything; did it not mean liberty and the Diamond Rock?

"And here is the watch," added M. de la Bourdonier.

All this time they were bowling along the road, sometimes near the surf-washed coast, sometimes among the hills and by plantations of sugar-cane and coffee and fragrant orange-trees; descending

into valleys where the banks were covered with ferns, and then climbing rocky slopes where cactuses and wild pineapples grew among the bushes. At first Tom shrank back in his corner, — he had the front seat, where he was quite hidden except to persons coming from behind, — but by degrees he gained confidence. They met plenty of people, but no one seemed to pay much attention to the carriage. A squad of foot soldiers drew to one side to let them pass ; two or three mounted officers bowed to M. de la Bourdonier ; and about nine o'clock they passed a guard-house. The carriage stopped there, and M. de la Bourdonier handed out a pass to the sergeant who stood by the roadside ; but the sergeant handed the paper back without even opening it, and saluted as they went on. In fact, it was a delightful drive, without even an interruption or a mishap. The planter pointed out interesting objects, and Mademoiselle chattered incessantly, and Tom almost forgot that he was a fugitive ; why should he remember it while he was treated only as a favored guest ? None of the passers-by imagined that there was a fugitive in the island, much less in the handsome carriage.

At length M. de la Bourdonier warned Tom that they were nearing the place where he was to leave them ; and soon after he ordered the coachman to stop. Then he got out, taking the basket, and motioning to Tom to follow. The road here was bordered by thickets.

“Adieu, monsieur,” cried Mademoiselle ; “I

hope you will have a pleasant walk ;” and Tom kissed the hand which she put out of the window. There were several soldiers standing near, but M. de la Bourdonier paid no attention to them. “Wait here,” he said to the coachman ; “I am going a little way with the gentleman.” Tom had the precious bag slung from his shoulder, and the planter carried the basket ; he led the way down a path, Mademoiselle waving her hand after them ; in a minute they were out of sight of the road, and in three minutes they encountered Alcide.

“Good-by,” said the planter ; “Alcide knows what to do. This path leads to a plantation, and the coachman will imagine you have gone there.” He shook hands, and turned back quickly, while Alcide led Tom into the woods.

XXVI

TALKING ACROSS THE WATER

THE negro had taken the basket of provisions, and a little way in the wood he showed where he had hidden a sack and a great gourd for water. Rapidly unpacking the basket, he put all the things in the sack and slung it to his shoulders. "Ba'ket no good fo' trabble in bush," he said, hiding it to be picked up on his return. The gourd was empty yet, but he explained that they could fill it farther on; he had used it during his first journey to the Morne Sec, and had left it in the woods. Meanwhile Tom had been taking off his clean shirt and stockings, and putting on the soiled ones which he had used in camp; he had learned by experience that a forest journey means mud and dirt, and he wanted the clean clothes for his return journey in the carriage.

The walk was a repetition of his other ones, except that the forest was not so thick and high, and the ridges were rather easier to climb. In one place they had to pass a road, but this was easily managed by Alcide, who led the way along a gully and under a small bridge where the road crossed it; they did not see a single person, and after that their way was through forest again. In

the afternoon they were overtaken by one of those sudden showers which are so common in the West Indies; Tom had seen several of them in camp, but he had been caught only once before, and he had a most uncomfortable recollection of that experience. When the black clouds gathered he looked around vainly for shelter; Alcide scanned the forest for palms or wild plantain leaves, but there were none in sight.

"Me tink yo' bettah sheaf yo'sef" (I think you should undress), he said quickly; and before the drops began to fall Tom had stripped; the negro made a compact bundle of the clothes and put them in the top of the provision sack, which he placed at the root of a tree and covered with arum-leaves and branches.

It was a cold bath, with a vengeance, and Tom's teeth were playing castanets; but it was over in ten minutes, and when he got into the dry clothes again he felt as warm as toast. Alcide grinned. "W'en rain-a pour de bes' clo's yo' can hab on is 'kin" (skin), he said.

After that the sun came out warmly, and though Tom got his legs wet with the dripping leaves, he did not mind that. The negro filled his gourd at a stream, and towards night they reached a secluded hollow with a row of pools in it; beyond was a steep hill covered with bushes.

"Morne Sec," said Alcide, pointing to the hill-side. Tom was eager to ascend at once, but the negro said it would take them until dark to reach the top, and they would find no good place to

camp there ; it was much better to pass the night in the hollow, where the water would do for a bath, though it was unfit for drinking. Tom assented, rather unwillingly ; the negro made him a pole-bed, sheltered by a few palm-leaves slanting over it, and they cooked and ate their dinner. It was an uncomfortable camp, for the place swarmed with mosquitoes ; Alcide made a smudge by heaping the nests of white ants on the fire, and he slept without any apparent discomfort, seeming quite impervious to the bites ; but the only relief Tom could get was by wrapping head and hands in his blanket, and a very hot and uncomfortable relief it was. Once, when he poked his head out, gasping, he heard the faint thunder of waves far in the distance. It was the surf on the windward side of the Diamond Rock, though Tom did not know it ; the Diamond was only two or three miles from their camp.

The mosquitoes disappeared after midnight, and Tom slept until Alcide awoke him ; as he opened his eyes he saw that the sky was gray above. He sprang up and dispatched his coffee and roast cassava as if his life depended on speed ; then he slung the precious bag to his shoulder, Alcide taking the canteen and cutlass, and they started to climb the hill.

Tom had never known a rougher scramble, not even on the Diamond Rock. The hill was one huge thicket of gnarled trees and bushes, all matted together with creepers until it was like a hedge ; and everything seemed bristling with

thorns. Through this Alcide had tunneled a narrow, winding path ; but the slope was so steep, and so covered with loose stones and rubbish, that they could hardly cling to it, and were literally forced to crawl upward. Half an hour of this work left Tom dripping with perspiration, though the hill was cool enough at that early hour ; the can-teen was a grateful relief.

As they neared the top of the hill, the path turned gradually toward the left, and Tom began to hear the wash of surf far beneath ; then he caught a glimpse of blue water through the bushes ; and then — oh, joy ! the Diamond Rock, sharp in front of them and hardly two miles away. In fact, they had worked halfway round the hill and were now on its seaward side, not far from the top. Below them, somewhere, was a sheer precipice, dropping into the sea ; but, luckily for Tom's courage, the bushes concealed its verge : even an English midshipman might have lost his head had he realized that he was on a slippery gable over a three-hundred foot precipice.

Eventually, they came out on a rocky platform in plain view of the Diamond but hidden from the rest of Martinique, just as a gable end is visible from that side of the house but hidden from every other side. Tom saw at once that it was admirably suited for his purpose, and he was wild with excitement. Over on the Diamond were the batteries and huts, with the English flag on top, a brave picture ; he could even distinguish some men walking about the "Queen's Battery ;" and

beyond were the masts and pennant of a ship ; the rocks concealed her hull, but he knew it was the old Centaur.

"Alcide," he whispered, "they will certainly notice us." He had the telescope out, and continued to speak in a whisper as he adjusted it : he might have shouted, for all the danger there was of being overheard ; but the place was so open that it did n't seem at all safe. He was looking at the moving men, but they were too distant to be recognized with certainty ; one seemed, by his dress, to be a midshipman. Perhaps their telescopes were stronger ; anyway, they would see the signal flags ; and he pulled out the cloth.

"We must have a flag-pole, Alcide ; a good, stout one, not very long." Alcide hunted vainly for a pole, but the bushes were all crooked or small ; so he had to go back on the path. Tom waited, hot with impatience, alternately studying the Diamond with his telescope and stopping to tramp about the platform like a wild animal. The sun was half an hour high and it was nearly seven o'clock before the negro returned with an excellent pole ; he had been forced to go far down the hill for it.

A part of the red cloth was torn off and lashed to the pole, and Tom began to wave it frantically, making the three downward strokes used to attract attention in Captain Maurice's code. Apparently nobody on the Diamond saw it ; Tom stopped every two or three minutes to observe the rock with his telescope, but there was no sign of

an answer. Then he fastened the rest of the red cloth to the pole, to make the flag larger, and made the negro wave it while he watched. Still no answer.

"We must try again," he said; but his voice was husky now. They tried again and yet again, with no better result. "I don't believe they're even looking this way!" exclaimed Tom disgustedly; he was ready to cry with vexation.

"Mebbe dey no able fo' see de flarg; but dem can see one big semoke easy-easy," suggested Alcide. "Le' a we mek one big fiah, big semoke; den dey wondah wha' he for, so dey look sha'p an' see de flarg."

"If we make a smoke it will attract their attention, you mean?"

"*Oui, missiè*; semoke dus go high a 'ky (just goes high as the sky); see um easy-easy."

"But could n't the French down below see the smoke?"

"Spose de French see um, dem go say, 'Ah, one ol' coal-pit,' dat arl. Wha' fo' dey mus' tink-a one angleesh body what mek um?"

"That's so," assented Tom; "if the French see the smoke they will not imagine it is a signal. Let's make a big fire, quick!"

"Now you yerry (hear) me one lilly bit. Bes' ting Missié can do is set hill afiah; him ketch an' 'pread arl ober."

"What do you mean?"

Alcide pointed to the slope above them; it was covered with tall grass, withered and yellow now,

for it was the dry season. On tropical mountainsides, where it is open enough, grass springs up luxuriantly during the rains, but ripens and dies when they are past. Alcide explained that such places were generally burned over every year, except where their proximity to cane-fields might risk setting the cane on fire. This slope had not been burned for several years, because the hill was out of the way and deserted, and the grass was thick and heavy. Moreover, the fire would not extend beyond the top of the hill, for the other side was well covered with green bushes. Tom remembered to have seen a burning hillside from the Diamond.

The negro began to pull up some of the grass, making it into a tight wisp for a torch; kindling this from his tinder-box, he ran along the hillside, lighting the grass in several places. The flames sprang up and mounted higher and began to climb the hill, gathering strength as they went and pouring volumes of black smoke into the air; for a moment Tom shrank from the heat; but the fire was burning away from him and over the top of the hill. The smoke rose in a great column and was wafted off by the trade-wind.

"They'll see that, anyway!" exclaimed Tom; and he grasped the flag again. Three downward strokes. He had to stop and look through the telescope. Three more strokes. Were they determined not to see him?

"Lemme wabe de flarg now," said Alcide; he had learned the three strokes by seeing Tom make them. The negro took the flag, and Tom

continued to watch through the telescope. The men in the "Queen's Battery" were talking to each other, and seemed to be pointing.

Suddenly the one Tom had taken for a midshipman sprang on the rampart; and — yes, he had something red on a pole; Tom hardly breathed. The answering flag was waved; three downward strokes! Tom tried to swallow a sob, but he could n't. He snatched the staff from Alcide and made one downward stroke: the signal to begin conversation. There was no need for the telescope; he could read the flag well enough without it.

The answering flag was spelling out words now; but it did seem such an eternity!

"W-h-o s-i-g-n-a-l-s?"

Trembling all over, Tom made answer: "T-o-m R-e-e-v-e-s."

A long pause, and the people on the Diamond were crowding together. Then their signal flag was raised:—

"G-a-m-m-o-n! T-o-m i-s d-e-a-d."

Tom was going to signal a contradiction, but somehow the word "gammon" seemed remarkably like Ned's talking; he bethought himself of their confidential conversations, and made their private signal — two diagonal strokes; whereat the figure on the rampart tumbled over backward. It reappeared instantly, waving like mad; and Tom managed to read: "Are you sure it's you?"

Tom answered: "It's me right enough. I was asleep in a boat, and it got loose and floated



TOM MADE ANSWER : "T-O-M R-E-E-V-E-S"

ashore." The people on the Diamond were rushing about and throwing up their hats ; but the flag — Ned's flag — waved on : —

"Did they capture you?"

"No," answered Tom, "I hid in the woods."

Ned signaled again: "Have you captured the island? Or what?"

Tom responded: "I got lost." The signalers had to construct short sentences, because, at best, it was slow work spelling out every word.

Signal from the Diamond: "Are you starving?"

Tom's signal: "No. A man is helping me. I want to get away."

Diamond signal: "Shall we invade Martinique to rescue you?"

Tom's signal: "Is the captain there?" A man who had just run up to the battery waved his hat, and the flag signaled: "Yes."

Tom's signal: "Will you help me?"

Instantaneous answer: "Of course." A pause, and the signaler was apparently consulting with the last comer ; then the Diamond flag went on: "Captain says we will help you if we can, and you must keep your courage up."

Tom's signal: "I have a plan." It was n't his plan, altogether, but "I" was shorter than an explanation.

Captain Maurice himself had taken the flag on the Diamond, and he waved: "What is it?"

This was the critical moment. Tom knew that he must be very exact, and he held the paper in his left hand while he signaled with the right:

"Make one down stroke when you understand me."

Answer from the Diamond: "All right."

"I will be on the east side of the island" —

The Diamond flag signaled: "You mean Martinique?"

"Yes. At eleven o'clock on Thursday night, the 19th of April."

One down stroke.

"I will go to Galeon Bay, just south of Caravelle Peninsula."

One down stroke.

"If possible, have a boat off the bay at the same time."

One down stroke.

"The crew of the boat should be in dark clothes, and the oars muffled."

One down stroke.

"The officer in charge must watch for my signal."

One down stroke.

"I will show a light, and after five seconds I will show it again."

One down stroke.

"The boat must then come into the bay, keeping in the shadow of the rocks."

A pause, and the Diamond flag asked: "How about the coast patrol?"

Tom signaled: "No patrol there at that hour; I made sure of that."

One down stroke.

"When the boat is well inside, it must show a small light twice with an interval of five seconds."

One down stroke.

"If I answer in the same way" —

"By showing a light twice, you mean?" questioned the Diamond flag.

"Yes: the boat must come quickly and take me off."

One emphatic downward stroke.

"But if I only show my light once" —

One down stroke.

"The boat must wait ten minutes, and then return to the offing and look out for another signal."

One down stroke.

"If you see no signal, wait as long as you can to make sure."

One down stroke.

"And then return to the Diamond."

A long pause. Then the Diamond flag waved:

"The boat will wait three hours after eleven o'clock."

Tom continued: "If you don't get me, look out for flag-signals from this place."

One down stroke.

"If Thursday night is too stormy," —

One down stroke.

"I will be at the same place at two bells in the first dog-watch on Sunday morning, the 22d. Light-signals the same."

One down stroke.

"That is all."

The people on the Diamond crowded together again. Then their flag was lifted: three downward strokes.

"Ready," signaled Tom.

"Captain Maurice signals," said the Diamond flag. Tom made one down stroke to show that he understood.

"I adopt your plan."

"God bless you, sir," signaled Tom.

"I will repeat it to make sure."

One down stroke of Tom's flag.

"I will have a boat off Galeon Bay at eleven o'clock on Thursday night, the 19th. Men in dark clothes, and oars muffled. When the boat sees a light twice with interval of five seconds, it will enter the bay, keeping near rocks. When well in, it will show a small light twice. If you answer with two lights, boat will come quickly and take you off. If you answer with only one light, boat will wait in bay ten minutes; then, if you have not shown two lights, will return to offing and look out for another signal. If boat sees no signal, it will wait until end of dog-watch to make sure, and will then give you up for that night. If boat does not get you on Thursday night, it will be off Galeon Bay at one o'clock on Sunday morning, the 22d; light-signals as before. We shall keep a lookout for flag-signals every day until we get you."

Tom made one down stroke.

Question from the Diamond: "Shall you signal again before Thursday night?"

Tom answered: "No; it is not safe to come here." Then a thought struck him; he continued: "But keep a lookout."

The Diamond flag made one downward stroke.

"I may have to change plan."

One down stroke.

"I have a friend who can come here."

One down stroke.

"If he shows a red flag, the plan is changed and you are not to go to Galeon Bay."

One down stroke.

"But look out for signals from here. That is all."

The Diamond repeated: "If we see a red flag at your present signal-station, we shall not send a boat to Galeon Bay, but shall look out for more flag-signals."

Tom made one down stroke with his flag.

The Diamond flag asked: "Who is the man with you?"

Tom signaled: "A negro guide. I have good friends to help me."

Pause. The Diamond flag signaled: "Can we do anything more for you?"

Tom signaled: "No." Then, after thinking a moment he added: "I'm all right. Good-by."

"God bless you, Tom!" came from the Diamond.

"God save the King!" waved Tom. The tears were streaming down his face.

The Diamond flag was raised again.

"It may be useful to have a password, as we meet at night."

Tom made one down stroke.

"The password is 'Diamond.'"

Tom made one down stroke.

"Repeat it."

"Diamond."

"Good-by."

The men on the rock waved their hats ; every battery was thronged now, and every hat went up ; Tom could almost hear the English hurrahs. Suddenly a man sprang on the rampart and then and there danced a most prodigious horn-pipe ; at the end he flung his hat over the precipice and twirled his fingers before his nose like a windmill, while he kicked in the air with one leg and danced on the other in defiance of gravity and naval discipline and everything else. But the tears of joy ran all the faster down Tom's face, for he knew that the dancer was Ralph.

All this had taken time ; you must remember that they were spelling out every word, letter by letter, by a system which was far inferior to our flag-telegraphing and much more tedious. The sun was beating down on Tom's head, and when he looked at his watch he found, to his amazement, that it was nearly eleven o'clock. Alcide was standing by in open-mouthed astonishment. He had understood that Tom wished to let his friends know where he was ; but why should these English wave flags at each other hour after hour ? Why should a man dance ; and why should Tom cry ?

"Wha' mek dat angleeshman-a darnce?" he asked dubiously.

"It was a sailor dancing," explained Tom. "I know him ; such a fine, brave fellow."

"De sailo' know Missié? Me t'ink so."

"I told him who I was. Why, Alcide, we have been talking all the time."

"Missié no able fo' tark so fa' 'way."

"But did n't you see? We talked with the flags, of course."

"*Pá pàlé ça*. One flarg go 'top yah (here), de nudder one go 'top dere. Dem carn't fly crarse (across). No hab writin', no hab nottin'."

"But my friends can see across, can't they? And when I wave in a certain way they know what I mean to say; then they answer with their flag, and I know."

Alcide looked at the red cloth, and crossed himself like a good Catholic. "Me shore dis obeah wuk," he said fearfully.

"What is obeah?"

But Alcide only shook his head and crossed himself again; probably he could not have explained had he tried. Obeah was originally a name given to heathen ceremonies and incantations which the negro slaves brought over from Africa. It is said that a few of them still practice the incantations in secret, and very silly and horrible they are. The better class of blacks have nothing to do with obeah, but they are more or less afraid of it, and anything mysterious is "obeah" to them.

XXVII

THE LETTER

TOM knew that his time was up, though it was hard to tear himself away; his friends were still cheering and watching him through their telescopes as he waved his hat in a good-by and followed Alcide down the path. He was tired, but he did not know it; every bit of him was tingling with joy and exultation and hope. The hillside, as soon as he got away from the sea, was stifling, and he could hardly bear his hands on the stones. Once he lost his foothold and slid down the slope, bringing up with a bump; but he only laughed. At the camp Alcide made a hasty pot of chocolate, and they took this with some cassava which had been left in the embers and was now roasted; Tom had a plunge in one of the pools, and was quite ready for his five-mile walk.

It was uneventful. At first they followed the path by which they had come, but after a while Alcide turned off towards the left; they reached a stream, which they followed up for half a mile, until they were nearing the carriage-road. Tom hastily put his clothes in order, getting off the worst of the mud with the brush, which he still carried, washing in the stream, changing shirt and

stockings, and throwing the dust-cloak over his shoulders; then he followed Alcide to the road, where there was a bridge over the stream. It was a very simple wooden bridge, without any railing at the side, and the banks of the stream underneath were overgrown with tall ferns. The negro showed Tom where he could conceal himself, lying on a rock close under the bridge; the ferns grew all around this rock, and it made a very good hiding-place. Alcide ran his cutlass into every cranny and under the bridge beams, to make sure that there were no snakes; then he said "*Bonjou', missiè*," climbed up to the road and walked rapidly away.

Tom lay down on the rock and waited. Two or three persons passed over the bridge, but he did not mind them much; only, the dust rattled down with their footsteps and got into his eyes. After a while two men came along together, chatting in French; they stopped on the bridge and sat down with their legs over the edge, in alarming proximity to Tom's head. The talk might have interested him had he been less scared; but the legs were so conspicuous that he simply could n't believe in his own concealment. It was a very uncomfortable situation; he felt morally certain that his own legs and arms were sticking out, and yet he did n't dare to draw them closer for fear of making a noise. He tried to breathe softly, but every instant his respiration seemed more audible. And he was astonished to hear the thumping of his own heart; when he wrinkled up his nose to dislodge

a fly, he heard that, too. The fact is, Tom was going through a very common experience ; being forced to silence, he became aware that his own body was full of noises, which seemed dreadfully loud because he had never noticed them before.

But the legs swung nonchalantly, quite unaware that there was an uncomfortable English midshipman within two feet of them. They were clad in coarse stockings and low shoes, such as French infantry soldiers wore at that time; and their owners were gossiping, as soldiers will, of their old campaigns in Egypt and Italy. One of them was a merry fellow, but his stories only made Tom's situation worse, he wanted to laugh so; it is possible to cry silently, but to laugh silently is another matter. And then he began to itch; elbows and sides and ankles and pretty much all the rest of him itched vilely, and he would n't have scratched for worlds. To cap the climax of his misery, he felt a sneeze coming; what if he should sneeze! The very thought put him in a cold sweat; he managed to rub his nose, but the sneeze was only pacified; it might explode at any moment, and then! —

"The English over on the Diamond have been waving their little red flag again," said one of the soldiers. "I saw them at it this morning."

Tom suddenly forgot the itching, and listened with all his ears. His end of the flag-telegraph had been hidden, but the Diamond end must have been visible to people on the Martinique coast.

"Some of the officers think that the English talk with these flags," observed the other soldier.

"As how?"

"Make signs with 'em; ships talk to each other with flags."

"I've seen that, too. But the ships have scores of flags, whole regiments of 'em, don't you see, and every flag with a different uniform; one flag means one word, and the next flag another word, and so on; 't is all down in a book, I'm told. That comprehends itself easily. But these English on the Diamond had only one flag, and they kept it waving and wagging, for all the world like a dog's tail. Does a dog talk with its tail, then?"

There was a gruff chuckle. "A dog may talk with its tail for all I know, seeing that it talks dog. Anyway, the English talk with these little red flags; our captain is sure of it."

Tom didn't like this. The shrewd French officers had divined the object of the flags, and they might guess more. In fact, had they tried seriously to decipher the code, they could have learned to read the flags as easily as the English did. In our days signaling "in presence of the enemy" requires special precautions and a secret code.

The conversation drifted off to other matters, and the soldiers chatted so long that Tom was afraid M. de la Bourdonier would come and find them on the bridge; but after a while they got up and went on. Tom gave a long sigh of relief as he shifted his cramped limbs. He did n't quite dare to get up.

Not long after there was a step on the bridge, and M. de la Bourdonier scrambled down the

bank. He seemed rather surprised to find Tom hiding himself, but merely shook hands with him as he emerged, and led the way up to the road. "It's all right," he said; "the carriage will be here in a minute. Don't say anything, but just salute Mademoiselle and get in. Did you succeed?"

"Splendidly!" cried Tom; "they are coming on Thursday."

"Well, we can talk about that in the carriage. Stand here with me, and act as if we had met by accident."

There was no one in sight, and they stood just beyond the bridge waiting until the carriage rolled up and stopped for them.

"Mademoiselle," said the planter, "Monsieur de la Rive has consented to share our coach again; he is going to the northern part of the island, and hopes to join me in another hunting trip."

Mademoiselle clapped her hands. "That is delightful!" she cried; "get in quick!" And in an instant Tom was installed on the front seat, Mademoiselle talking in one continuous stream. "I'm so glad! Have you had a pleasant day? Monsieur my father and I breakfasted with the governor; such a nice gentleman! And he gave me a box of bonbons; real bonbons, direct from France. Do try one!" and she instantly popped a huge candy ball into Tom's mouth.

"I found only this fern-root," said her father, showing one which he carried; "what shall I do with it?"

"The box is under the coachman's seat. What a pretty fern! I never saw that kind before." M. de la Bourdonier gravely handed up the fern to the coachman, and got in; they were all laughing as the carriage rattled off again.

"It's as good as a theatre!" exclaimed the little girl. "Do you like my candy?"

"*Manmzhel*," gurgled Tom, with his mouth all sugary, "*dje shui*" —

"Oh, throw it away!" cried the delighted Mademoiselle; "you don't need it any more. I only put the candy in so you could n't talk bad French until we started." Tom extracted the bonbon with difficulty, and dropped it out of the window; even candy may lose its sweetness if one is choking with it.

"I want you to carry this letter," said M. de la Bourdonier. "Keep it under your cloak, but hand it out if I ask for it, taking care not to expose your uniform."

Tom took the letter, which was a long, official-looking package addressed to "M. le sous-lieutenant Jean Cartouche, à Petit-Robert." He wondered why he had been asked to carry it, and Mademoiselle was evidently wondering too, but she had other things to talk about.

"Did you telegraph?" she asked eagerly. "Did the English see you? Now tell all about it."

So Tom gave a long account of the signaling; Mademoiselle drinking in every word and clasping her hands at the most exciting points. "How I wish I had been there!" she cried; "but yes; I

am resolved never to travel without a red flag ; then you climb a hill and your friends know everything."

M. de la Bourdonier was hardly less interested, and he congratulated Tom warmly. "It could n't be better," he said. "To-day is Monday ; you must go back to your old camp, but I will join you on Wednesday ; on Thursday we shall be at Galeon Bay."

"Don't forget me," cried Mademoiselle.

"Oh, it will not do for you to go to the woods so soon again ; but I promise that you shall see your protégé once more."

"Well," pouted the little lady, "I have a very special interest in him. I'm not sure but I like him better than Napoleon."

"The Emperor?"

"No, monsieur ; the pig. Napoleon is a French pig, of course ; but then, he does not talk with red flags as M. de la Rive does," — Tom opened his eyes again at this Frenchification of Reeves. "On the whole, I think I like M. de la Rive better, though he is English ;" and Mademoiselle tossed her saucy head.

"You forget that he killed the sow," said her father gently.

Mademoiselle was ashamed of herself in an instant. "Forgive me !" she pleaded ; "I was only joking ; you know that. And I like you better than a hundred pigs ; almost as well as I like Monsieur my father. Besides, you said I was *reglaire stu-naire*."

"You are!" said Tom emphatically. Then his eyestwinkled with fun. "Mademoiselle," he added, "you 're a regular stunner — though you are French."

"Well parried!" laughed the planter; and they chatted on, as merrily as possible, for every one was hopeful now. Tom told about the soldiers on the bridge, and they laughed again when he tried to mimic them in his uncertain French.

As on the preceding day, the people along the road merely stepped aside to let the carriage go by; and at the guard-house a young officer waved the pass aside when M. de la Bourdonier presented it. "Pas nécessaire," he said, touching his hat; "tout le monde connaît Monsieur et Mademoiselle. Bon voyage!"

"What a splendid idea the carriage was," observed Mademoiselle. "Nobody has even suspected."

"Better not sing *Te Deum* until we know that the battle is won," returned her father. "We have been very fortunate, though."

There was a clatter of hoofs behind them, and two mounted officers galloped up beside the carriage. Coming from behind, they could see Tom in his corner very well; he tried to look unconscious, but succeeded badly.

"Ah!" cried M. de la Bourdonier, "is that you, Captain Lenoir? *Bonjour*, lieutenant." He called to the coachman, and the carriage stopped; the officers bent down from their saddles and kissed Mademoiselle's hand as she put it out of the window.

"Je vous souhaite le bonjour, messieurs. Where are you going?" she asked.

"Beyond Trinité. There is news from France."

"I know," said M. de la Bourdonier; "we breakfasted with the governor. They talk of war with Austria."

"France is not afraid of all Europe!" proclaimed Mademoiselle. "I hate the Austrians!"

The officers laughed. "Mademoiselle should be a general," said the captain. "Who is this young gentleman?" he asked, glancing curiously at Tom.

Poor Tom! He could not keep the blood from rushing to his face.

"This is M. de la Rive," said the planter quietly. Tom touched his cap, and his friend went on quickly, "That reminds me, captain; will you do us a great favor?"

"With all the pleasure in the world," answered the captain.

"You pass the post at Petit-Robert, do you not?"

"Yes; we should be there by five o'clock."

"We have a letter for the lieutenant in charge of the post—Sous-Lieutenant Cartouche, is it not? Some official order, I suppose. Monsieur le Gouverneur was going to send it by a courier, but there was no particular hurry about it, and I said we would see that it reached the lieutenant; the post is only a short ride beyond our house, you know. Monsieur de la Rive has the letter now,

but I want him to join me in a trip to the woods. Would it be too much trouble for you to deliver the paper?"

"*Pas du tout*; on the contrary, I am delighted to oblige you and M. de la Rive;" and he bowed to Tom, who returned the salutation rather awkwardly and handed out the letter with one hand while he held the cloak in place with the other. Tom was trembling, but the captain did not notice that; he took the paper, looked at the superscription, and put it in his saddle-bag.

"Hope you will have a pleasant trip," said the captain; "I wish I were going with you. Are you fond of shooting?"

"Of course he is," put in Mademoiselle quickly; "he has been in the woods with us before. I shot an agouti."

"I congratulate you."

"When you see Monsieur le Lieutenant Cartouche, tell him I have not forgotten his kindness to me."

"What! You have met the little lieutenant then?"

"He was very obliging to me," returned Mademoiselle.

"Naturally; if you talked with him for three minutes he was your adoring slave, like all the rest of us. Well, good-day; we must be getting on. May I dine at your house next week, Mademoiselle?" Inviting one's self to dinner was quite the correct thing in hospitable Martinique.

"If you are good, and will bring me some

bonbons," retorted Mademoiselle. "I like you a great deal better when you bring me bonbons."

"Then I shall certainly bring them," laughed the captain. "Bonjour, mademoiselle; bonjour, messieurs;" and the officers galloped on, leaving Tom, at least, astonished at his deliverance. He had not said a word, thanks to Mademoiselle's quickness.

"I am glad you did not mention how M. de la Rive killed the sow," said the planter; "I was half afraid you would, when you spoke of shooting."

"As if I did n't know better!" said Mademoiselle, tossing her curls. "If I had told that they would have kept us talking about it for half an hour; and they would have told it all over the island, and then everybody would have been asking who M. de la Rive was. I have n't told a single person."

"I commend your prudence," said her father; and Tom wondered within himself if any other child of her age was so phenomenally thoughtful. His admiration for the planter had grown also; he understood now why he had been asked to carry the letter.

Half an hour later they came up with Alcide, who was standing by the roadside. M. de la Bourdonier let the carriage pass him before calling to the coachman to stop; then he got out, with Tom.

"Alcide," said the planter, as the negro came up, "Monsieur de la Rive is going to the woods again; take your orders from him. Show the way

to our old camp, and I will join you there to-morrow or next day."

"*Oui, missiè*," answered Alcide respectfully.

"Mademoiselle left her gun there, you know," added the planter.

"M. de la Rive is very welcome to use it," said Mademoiselle from the window. "Take good care of him, Alcide."

"*Oui, manmzell*," said Alcide.

"Wait," said the planter, and he drew a basket from the carriage. "There are some things which may be useful to-night, as you cannot reach camp until to-morrow; a luncheon which Mademoiselle put up, but we should not use it, anyway, so you may as well have it." Tom bowed, and Alcide took the basket.

"*Au revoir!*" and Mademoiselle put out her hand; Tom had learned to kiss it gracefully by this time. Then M. de la Bourdonier embraced him and got into the carriage, which went on with Mademoiselle's handkerchief waving from the window. In two minutes Tom and Alcide were safe in the woods.

XXVIII

ON THE WAY

THEY slept at the ranch by the old charcoal-pit, and when Tom opened Mademoiselle's "lunch-eon" he found it a feast for a king; roast fowls, bread, vegetables, half a dozen kinds of fruit, and a bottle of claret. Tom remembered that M. de la Bourdonier had called his daughter "the commissary-general;" and it occurred to him that a campaign under such auspices would be nice for the soldiers, though it might tax the transportation-train.

In the morning they got back to camp without trouble, and the day passed uneventfully. Tom took a walk down the valley with Mademoiselle's gun, but found nothing; and in the afternoon Alcide showed him how to catch fish by poisoning the water. He had gathered a quantity of leaves from a shrub which grew plentifully on the hill-side; these were beaten to a pulp between two stones, and thrown into a deep, quiet pool. After a few minutes a fish came to the surface and floated there, upside down, until the negro caught it in his hands; it was not dead, but stupefied. Alcide called this fish *tétar*, and said it was very good eating. Two more *tétar* came to the surface,

besides a number of the small *loche* which Tom had seen going over the wet rocks ; these, being almost useless for food, were thrown into another pool, where they speedily revived and swam away. Alcide said that poison-fishing was much better in little bays and lagoons along the coast. It is, in fact, used occasionally all over tropical America, but it is only effective where the water is quiet ; a strong current carries off the poison too rapidly. The leaves of several different plants can be used, and none of them injure the fish for eating, as Tom found when the *tétars* were cooked for dinner.

There were crayfish in the stream, and little snails clinging to the rocks under water ; Alcide said that these snails — *caracols*, as he called them — were sometimes eaten, but he did not seem inclined to add them to the larder. Alcide was something of an epicure in his way. “ On’y dem trash naygur dus eat caracol,” he said ; “ dem one ting dat me nebber lay crarse me mout’. Me on’y dus eat manicou [opossum], dem tas’e pretty good ; an *ver-palmiste*, dem mos’ ex’lent.” Tom asked him what the *ver-palmiste* was, and he said he would try to find one ; so he began to search among some young palm-trees about the ranch. After a while he found a palm which looked yellow and sickly ; splitting open the trunk, he extracted a huge white grub. “ Ver-palmiste ! ” he said, with a grin.

“ You don’t mean to say that you eat that thing ! ” cried Tom, in horror.

"Me no goin' eat dis one ; gib um fo' missié wash he mout' [as a relish] bum-by ;" and Alcide held out the grub generously.

Tom recoiled. "Why, I would n't eat it, not if I was starving !" he exclaimed.

Alcide looked astonished and a little hurt. "Me tink angleesh no eat ver-palmiste causin dey no hab dem a dat country. Dem de bes' kin' fo' eat. Ev'y-buddy eat um ; buckra man [white man], naygur, ev'ybuddy." But Tom assured him that he was welcome to keep the grub, and he nearly lost his own appetite when Alcide spitted and broiled the thing. Subsequently, M. de la Bourdonier told Tom that the ver-palmiste was really considered a dainty by many white creoles. "I never could stomach them myself," he said, "but perhaps that is because I was born and educated in France. They are regularly sold in the markets, and people fry them in oil and vinegar."

Alcide found another dainty, though not quite such a tit-bit as the ver-palmiste. While they were preparing dinner a rustling and clattering sounded from the hillside. "Crarb !" shouted the negro, and he ran up the hill, with Tom after him ; they found more than fifty large crabs making their way awkwardly down the valley. "But yere [hear] a' me, missié. Angleeshman dus eat crarb?" asked Alcide.

Tom was doubtful, but said he would try one, if Alcide would cook it, and the negro proceeded to gather a dozen of them, seizing the creatures by the body so that they could not pinch him with

their great claws. At first he broke off the claws ; but Tom remonstrated against the cruelty of this, so Alcide showed him how to tie the claws together with vine-stems. Tom himself caught a number, — getting woefully pinched before he learned how, — and they carried the struggling mass to camp, holding it at arm's length by the vine-cords. The negro said that the crabs were on their way to the sea, and that others would join them on the road, until there was a great army. “ Bum-by dey go com' back a mountain. Me, I dunno wha' mek dem go down a' sea ; tink dey fool beas' fo' lub trabble so.” The fact is, that they seek the coast yearly in order to lay their eggs in the salt water ; many of those which come back are the young crabs. During a great part of the year they wander in the damp mountain forest, living singly under logs or in crannies. Alcide boiled the crabs, and Tom found them pretty good.

M. de la Bourdonier arrived next morning, and at once told Tom that it would be wiser to leave the camp that day. “ To-morrow night you must meet your friends,” he said ; “ and you will have to pass by my plantation. I would give you a bed in my house if it were safe ; but as I cannot well do that, we will get as near to the plantation as possible ; we can sleep in the place where you passed the first night with Alcide. Then you will be fresh for to-morrow, and much nearer to Galeon Bay.”

“ How am I to get there ?” asked Tom, in great excitement.

"Without trouble, probably. You will have to take the public road until you are near the beach, but I shall go with you. Do you ride?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom. He had been trained to the saddle almost as soon as he could walk, for Squire Reeves lived in a hunting county and kept an excellent stud.

"So much the better ; I will have horses ready soon after nightfall, and we shall have plenty of time to ride to the bay ; it is only seven or eight miles from my house."

"But I cannot bear to make so much trouble, sir," stammered Tom.

M. de la Bourdonier laughed. "Mademoiselle cut that knot before," he said. "You can't help yourself, so it is useless to talk about it. Besides," he added gravely, "I have n't forgotten the sow yet. And I imagine that you would do just as much for me if our positions were reversed."

"Indeed I would, sir !" cried Tom.

"That is all right, then ; you owe me nothing, and as for Mademoiselle, she is infinitely obliged to you ; you have given her the most exciting experience of her life."

Tom smiled. "How is Mademoiselle?" he asked.

"She is always well. At present she is occupied with the education of Napoleon ; she put me under oath not to tell you anything about it, because she is going to exhibit the pig's accomplishments to-morrow."

Eager as Tom was, he was sorry to leave the

pleasant camp, it had been so like a home. Many a time in after years he thought of it, and wondered if the forest had been changed by the invasion of settlers. I think not, for the place was almost in the centre of Martinique. Probably it is untouched to this day, and the forest is as green as ever; this part of it was beyond the range of the great volcanic eruption of 1902.

They slept that night at Tom's old camping-place: that is, strictly speaking, the planter and Alcide slept soundly, but Tom lay awake half the night, too much excited to close his eyes. Deliverance seemed so close now: twenty-four hours hence he would be on an English boat, and then on an English ship, and then on the Diamond Rock. How Ned would shout when he saw him! And how Ralph and the other sailors would touch their hats and grin; and how warmly Captain Maurice would greet the fugitive; and what stories he would have to tell of his adventures, and what letters to write home! Through it all his heart swelled when he thought of the friends who were aiding him; and over and over again he promised himself to show his gratitude if ever peace came between England and France. He had never thought of peace before, except as a means of punishing the French; now he began to see that peace might be a good thing in itself, because it would bring friends together.

M. de la Bourdonier went on to his plantation in the morning, having arranged with Tom to follow, under Alcide's guidance, later in the day.

"You can come to the place where you first met me," he said; "it is hidden from the house, and I will see that the plantation hands are working in another cane-patch." So Tom remained all the morning, walking up and down under the trees and eating his heart out with impatience; he could hardly swallow the excellent breakfast which Alcide prepared.

They started about two hours after noon, and by three reached the little glade where Tom had first encountered Mademoiselle. Here Alcide left him, and Tom spent half an hour cleaning his uniform as well as he could; then he put on the dust-cloak and waited. In a short time the planter appeared; Mademoiselle was with him, and Napoleon trotted after Mademoiselle.

"*Bonjour*," said the little lady, extending her hand for Tom to kiss. "You are to dine with us at the house."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Tom; "won't that be awfully risky?"

"Of course not. There is nobody in the house except kitchen servants, and they will not see you; and if they do, it will not make any difference, because they don't know that you are going to be rescued."

"It really is the safest and simplest way," explained the planter. "You have to pass through the plantation in any case; if you stayed here until dark, there would be more than a chance of discovery by one of the field hands; they return from work at five o'clock, and after that they may be

all over the place. You can come to the house now with safety, and the hands are never admitted there. We have got rid of most of the house servants."

"The butler has a holiday," said Mademoiselle; "and after he went I told Albertine — she is the table-girl — that she could lay the cloth for dinner and go for a visit until seven o'clock; and I gave her a new *foulard* [neckerchief], because then she will be sure to stay as long as she can and show it to all her friends. Of course, she thinks I shall get another girl to wait on the table; but no!"

"There will be no servants except the cook and her crowd in the kitchen," added M. de la Bourdonier. "If any visitors appear, you must go to another room; but I don't think that we shall be interrupted. So come along."

"First, I must show you what Napoleon can do," interposed Mademoiselle. "I must show him here because he is not allowed to come into the house."

"But he calls at the door every morning," laughed the planter, "and is disconsolate until Mademoiselle appears."

"And he sleeps on the veranda," added Mademoiselle. "He will have nothing to say to the other pigs; Napoleon just turns up his nose at them."

"Observe the effects of too much education," said the planter. "The pig is an aristocrat."

"No," said Mademoiselle; "but he is fastidious. It is only natural that he should be."

Napoleon had been divested of his uniform, "because he got it dirty," explained Mademoiselle; but he had a blue ribbon about his neck, and was very clean and pink — quite a charming little pig. He came quickly when his mistress whistled.

"Bow to the gentlemen!" said Mademoiselle, putting her finger on the ground before the pig's nose. Napoleon bobbed his head, and the spectators applauded.

"At present, count," ordered Mademoiselle. "One!"

Napoleon struck the ground once with his fore hoof.

"Two!"

Napoleon struck the ground twice.

"Three!"

Napoleon hesitated and winked; then he struck the ground twice, as before.

"You are stupid!" said Mademoiselle severely. "Three!" and she held up three fingers. Napoleon remembered himself, and struck the ground three times.

"That is better. Now you must show how to dig zignames." Mademoiselle made a hole in some loose earth near the stream and buried a stick, stamping it down with her heel. "Now dig it!" she commanded.

Napoleon began to root industriously in the earth, finally dragging out the stick with a great flourish and trotting up to his mistress with it; at first he seemed inclined to hold on to the stick, pulling it vigorously after Mademoiselle had taken

hold of the end ; but she admonished him with a box on the ear, and he let it go reluctantly.

"Napoleon is n't very well trained yet," apologized the little girl. "He thinks pulling away the stick is fine play. But he will improve. Now sing!" she ordered, holding up one hand.

Then Napoleon lifted up his voice and squealed a melodious squeal ; and the more Mademoiselle raised her hand, the more vociferous Napoleon became. Whether the song was musical or not, it was certainly effective ; the planter and Tom laughed until the tears rolled down their cheeks, and even Mademoiselle smiled. "I think he sings very well," she said.

"How in creation did you teach him that?" asked her father.

"It took me a long time, and it was ever so much trouble. First I held up the cup, and Napoleon knew there was milk in it, and he asked for the milk, and I gave it to him. I did that many times ; and then I held up my hand, and Napoleon thought I had the cup, and he squealed, and I gave him some milk. And so, after a while, he learned that I wanted him to squeal when I held up my hand. It is very simple," said Mademoiselle, "only it is tedious."

Then she gave Napoleon a small lump of sugar, and announced that the performance was over, "because I have only taught him a little yet," she explained. Tom wondered what the pig would be when his education was completed.

XXIX

HOSPITALITY

THEY left the glade — Napoleon trotting after his mistress — and followed a road through the cane-field until they came to the house. It was a long, low building, with a tile roof, and verandas half covered with vines and roses ; this was the back of the house, and there was a large open space, with several out-buildings. Some negroes, standing about, crossed their arms respectfully as M. de la Bourdonier came up, but they paid no attention to Tom, whose uniform was hidden by the dust-cloak. The planter led the way around to the front, which was much like the back, but had a great flight of stone steps leading to the veranda, and an open doorway ; there was a garden full of flowering shrubs, and a grove of dark, spreading mango-trees at one side. But most glorious of all was an avenue leading through the cane-fields ; this was bordered by two rows of palms, eighty feet high, and the avenue was half a mile long. Far down the valley there was a glimpse of the sea.

M. de la Bourdonier and his daughter entered the house first, turning in the doorway to greet Tom ; the planter embraced him, and Mademoiselle extended her hand to be kissed, just as if she

were meeting a guest, instead of walking in with him. As for Napoleon, he did not go in at all, but trotted contentedly down the veranda. For Napoleon was intelligent, and knew the limits of his range; an easy thing to teach young pigs when they do not associate with old and unruly ones. If I am fortunate enough to have country boys for readers, they may not believe this; but let them try the experiment, only taking care that their pupils have no associates except such as have first learned the lesson. It is perfectly easy to confine a pig to one half of a yard or field, by simply teaching him that he must not venture into the other half; and the teaching is more effectual than a fence.

The large drawing-room extended through the house, and was open at both ends; it was separated from the other rooms by whitewashed walls, exactly like the house walls and, like them, very thick and strong—a precaution against hurricanes. There was no ceiling, and the room went right up to the tile-roof, which was supported by rough beams. The floor, of hard wood, had no carpet, but two or three rush mats were spread about; the walls were bare, except for some excellent portraits in oil and, on one side, a kind of trophy made of guns, swords, and pistols. The furniture, brought from France, was light and graceful—quite different from English furniture of that period; there was a table, with decanters and wine-glasses, for everybody used wine in those days; near the table was a huge basket of

fruit of a dozen kinds — oranges, bananas, mangoes, and so on. Of course, there was no fire-place in that climate; everything was arranged for coolness and comfort, with very little attempt at ornament, because people lived practically out of doors. In fact, the veranda was more used than the house; there were several chairs set out on it, with a table, Mademoiselle's workbox, and two or three books.

The little girl brought glasses of wine to the gentlemen; then she curtsied and retired, and after a few minutes the planter led Tom through the veranda to a large, airy bedroom. Besides the usual toilet articles, this room had a wooden tub of water standing in the centre, and a great array of towels; on the back of a chair was Tom's own linen, washed, mended, and laid out for him; Alcide had brought it back from the woods some days before. "Of course," said his host, "you understand why I cannot send a servant to wait on you; but put your shoes outside the door to be cleaned;" and he left Tom to take his bath. I mention these little things because they show what West Indian hospitality was, and is; nowadays they have more elaborate arrangements, but the spirit is the same.

When Tom came out, the planter met him on the veranda and showed him the sugar-house, a quarter of a mile away, where it was half hidden by trees. "The negro quarters are beyond it," he said. "The plantation is mostly of sugar-cane, but I have a cacao orchard — almost the only one on

the island. Coffee will not grow well here ; it is too low and sandy." In answer to a question from Tom, he said there were about three hundred negro slaves on the place ; "and because of them I am here," he added, with a slight smile. The remark puzzled Tom, but M. de la Bourdonier did not explain it ; he seldom talked about himself. Long afterward Tom learned that he had been an officer in the army when the Martinique plantation and slaves were left to him by the death of a relative. He did not wish to change his life, but he knew that if the negroes were sold, they might fall into the hands of bad men ; if he freed them, as he thought of doing, they would be helpless, because they did not know how to take care of themselves. So this man, who hated slavery, resigned his commission, came to Martinique with his little daughter, — his wife was dead, — and took charge of three hundred slaves, because it was the right thing to do ; there was no kinder master in the island. All honor to him and to men like him ! There were some in the West Indies, and very many in the southern United States. Slavery was no fault of theirs ; they inherited the curse, and by their quiet goodness turned it into something very like a blessing.

At that time slavery existed on all the West Indian islands, English and Spanish, as well as French, and Tom had not concerned himself much about it ; he was more interested in the orchids hanging about the veranda, and in a parrot on a perch at one end.

After a few minutes Mademoiselle came out, pretty in silk and lace. "Dinner is served," she said. "You are to take me in;" and she laid the tips of her fingers on Tom's hand, with a fine air of conferring a favor while she received one; it never seemed to occur to Mademoiselle that she was eleven years old, instead of twenty. So Tom raised her hand, as his sisters had taught him to do, and led her to the dining-room as if they were walking through an old-fashioned dance: it was the custom of the time. Mademoiselle took her place sedately, but presently jumped up to carry to Tom a plate of soup, for the table was large; indeed, it was laid for a dozen persons; allowance had been made by the servants, as usual, for the arrival of chance guests.

"Cook is sure we are crazy," said Mademoiselle, "because we let both the table-servants go. She said she would get a girl to wait on us, and I said no, we could wait on ourselves; and then cook held up her hands, so, and said it was too much! I locked the door," added Mademoiselle gleefully, "because I was afraid cook might come up here herself; she thinks it is n't proper for white people to pass their own plates."

"No doubt the story will be all over the island to-morrow," remarked the planter; "but it will not surprise anybody, because Mademoiselle has such a reputation for doing remarkable things. Once she turned her bedstead upside down. You know how high the bedstead posts are?"

Tom nodded and laughed. Old-fashioned bed-

steads were low, but they had posts ten or twelve feet high, used to support curtains.

"She said the bed was too near the floor."

"It was," said Mademoiselle. "I was afraid the mice would jump on it while I was asleep." She was laughing at the remembrance.

"So she got two negroes to assist the housemaid, and together they managed to turn the bedstead over and set it on the ends of the curtain posts; I think the negroes must have appreciated the joke, or they would never have dared to do it. Well, the bed was certainly high enough then; they had to stand on tables to make it up, — on the other side of the bed-slats, you understand, — and when Mademoiselle went to bed, she had to set a chair on top of the table before she could climb in."

"I bumped my head against the beams," laughed Mademoiselle. "And then, when I was asleep, my father came and took the table and chair away. And in the morning I had to call and call, because I couldn't get down; it was truly dreadful!"

So the dinner passed, with much talking and laughing; and after it they sat on the veranda, where they were concealed by the vine-trellises. Many negroes passed by, and once an overseer rode up to the door to speak to the planter; but no one observed Tom.

Just as the sun set Mademoiselle got up, curtsied to her father and kissed his hand; he kissed her forehead with a "*Bonsoir, ma fille*," and then both said good-evening to Tom; after that

they went on talking as before. It was a pretty, old-world custom, which still survives in some out-of-the-way places.

"It seems so strange that I am here," said Tom ; "and that I shall be back under the English flag to-night."

"None the worse, I hope," responded the planter. "And when the war is over, remember that this house is always open to you and your friends."

"If you don't shoot us before then," observed Mademoiselle. Tom smiled.

"That reminds me," said her father ; "Mademoiselle has something which she wishes to give you ; a memento of your visit." Mademoiselle ran to get the present, a tiny silver chocolate-cup.

"Oh, it is too fine !" exclaimed Tom.

"Nothing is too fine for our friends," retorted Mademoiselle grandly.

"It will do," said the planter. "Do you know what this mark is?" He showed Tom a small engraved figure on the silver, like a vase with three projections or horns.

"No, sir," said Tom.

"It is a fleur-de-lis. The cup was a toy, and belonged to a royal princess ; she gave it to Mademoiselle's great-grandmother."

A royal princess ! It took Tom's breath away. "But I cannot take such a valuable thing," he cried ; "and a family heirloom, too !"

"Bah !" retorted Mademoiselle ; "the princess was only a Capet."

"No ; a Bourbon," corrected her father ; "and

what was more, a good woman. You need not hesitate to take the cup ; there are half a dozen more of these fleur-de-lis things about the house. I do not value them much, and Mademoiselle will be grieved if you do not accept her present."

"No," said Mademoiselle ; "I shall be offended."

So Tom was constrained to take the pretty thing, and it was packed in a small box for convenience in carrying. He searched his pockets for something to give Mademoiselle, but found nothing but his penknife and a few coins ; neither seemed suitable, and he said so.

Mademoiselle looked on gravely. "I should like one of your buttons," she said ; "I never had an English button."

"But that will be such a silly present !" protested Tom.

"Well," said Mademoiselle, in her direct way, "you have n't anything better, you know ; and I should like something."

"Give her a button," laughed the planter ; "she wants it to remind herself that she captured an English officer."

"No," said Mademoiselle ; "I want it to remind me that you are rescued." So Tom cut off a brass button from his coat, and Mademoiselle took it with a curtsy. "I am sorry that you are going away," she said.

XXX

EXIT MADEMOISELLE

M. DE LA BOURDONIER had been explaining his plan. "We can ride to Galeon Bay, without trouble," he said; "I know the path around the guard-house. But it will be better not to ride down the avenue, where there may be lights; and we should not be seen leaving the house together. There is a bridle-path which strikes the carriage-road a little farther south — that is, farther from Galeon Bay. Alcide will take you down the path on foot, because horses might be heard; and when you get to the road, he will conceal you among the bushes and come back to the house. Meanwhile, I shall walk around by the avenue and the road, and meet you at the path; of course, it will seem quite natural for me to go through my own grounds. It will be dark, but you will know me because I shall whistle twice; then we can walk back along the road to the entrance of the avenue, where Alcide will meet us with the horses. That will be perfectly natural, too; Alcide frequently goes with me, as he is going to-night, and I often prefer to walk as far as the road; in that case he follows me a little later. As for the extra horse, if anybody sees it, it will

not seem at all strange ; it might be a spare horse, or to bring a friend back, or anything."

"May not I go with you as far as the path?" asked Mademoiselle.

Her father reflected. "Very well," he said ; "that can do no harm. It will be early, so it will cause no surprise if you are out. But you must go mounted ; then you can leave us at the avenue and ride back to the house. It will be all right on our own grounds ; but of course I should not let you ride alone at night on the public road."

Mademoiselle clapped her hands, and ran to put on her riding-habit.

M. de la Bourdohier explained that he wished to start soon after dark, not only because it would give them plenty of time in case of delays, but because late travelers were more likely to be noticed and questioned. "Nobody will trouble me when I come back," he said, "even if it is after midnight ; I go everywhere, and have a general pass. The regular patrol should be at Galeon Bay about nine o'clock, but we can easily avoid it. I will bring you a dark cloak ; it will be better than the other."

Alcide appeared before seven o'clock ; Tom was covered with the dark cloak, and Mademoiselle insisted on buttoning it up closely, though Tom found it rather warm. "It will be cool enough when you are on horseback," she said. The little girl was dressed in a light-colored riding-habit, and looked more bewitching than ever. Tom offered to kiss her hand.

"Oh, I shall meet you on the road," she said; "*à bientôt.*" The little lady was too wise to lavish her favors, but she waved her hand from the veranda as Tom went.

The darkness was gathering fast, and Alcide led the way silently along a narrow path through the cane-field; presently they passed under the trees. Sheltered as they were from the wind, the heat was stifling.

"O Alcide," cried Tom; "I wish I could take off the cloak!"

"No hurt nuttin tek um arf," said Alcide; "naygur no go com' yeh arter da'k; dey 'fraid senake too bad. Me mos' 'fraid fo' com' yeh mese'f." There was still light enough to see the ground, and the negro scanned it closely as he walked. He offered to carry the cloak; so Tom took it off and gave it to him, rather against his better judgment; but it was such a relief to get rid of the thing. Presently they came in sight of the road, and Tom forgot all about the cloak. Alcide showed him where to stand among the bushes, and went back, carrying the cloak over his arm; he, too, had forgotten it.

A few minutes passed, and it was quite dark before Tom heard footsteps and a horse's tramp coming down the road; presently there were two soft whistles, and he stepped out.

"Better not talk much," said M. de la Bourdonier, in a low voice; "and I have warned Mademoiselle to be careful when she bids you good-by."

"It is ever so much more interesting to rescue people in the night," observed Mademoiselle from her horse.

"It may be altogether too interesting if you talk so loud," cautioned her father. Then he took Tom's arm, and they walked up the road beside Mademoiselle; she was conspicuous in the darkness, because she was mounted and had a light-colored riding-habit. The road passed through a cutting, with steep banks on each side.

Suddenly M. de la Bourdonier stopped. "Where is your cloak?" he asked.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Tom; "I gave it to Alcide to carry because it was so hot, and then I forgot it."

"Well, never mind; the entrance to the avenue is just ahead, and Alcide will be there with the cloak. We must hurry on."

"Hark!" whispered Mademoiselle.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, came the sound of marching troops, and a light appeared ahead. On the instant Mademoiselle struck her horse with her riding-whip, and it sprang forward right in front of the soldiers. The planter had gripped Tom's arm, and they stood perfectly still in the dark cutting.

"Who goes there?" called a good-natured voice.

"France!" came Mademoiselle's clear response. She answered as if the call had been a patrol's challenge, though it was not meant for one.

"Why, it's a child!" exclaimed the officer,

holding up his lantern. "You are out late, mademoiselle."

"I left my father but now," said Mademoiselle carelessly; "he was going somewhere with a gentleman. I was just turning up that avenue to our house." She kept her horse in the middle of the road, and the soldiers had halted without orders, because they could not very well march over her.

"Ah," said the officer; "then you are Mademoiselle de la Bourdonier. I did n't mean to stop you; of course you may pass."

But Mademoiselle showed no inclination to pass; her horse was curveting right across the road. "Who are the soldiers?" she asked.

"A battalion of the 27th infantry, going to Fort-de-France, mademoiselle. We are traveling at night because it is cooler."

"Any news from up there?"

"No, mademoiselle. There was an English vessel lying off Galeon Bay" (the planter pinched Tom's arm), "but they are always about."

"Bah, these English!" cried Mademoiselle scornfully. "How far have you come, monsieur?"

"From Trinité. We left there at four o'clock."

"*Ciel!*" cried Mademoiselle; "but you must be tired!"

"Not at all; we are used to it. We shall stop in an hour and cook supper."

"You will do nothing of the kind!" said Mademoiselle, with decision; "you will go up to our

house ; it is past supper-time now. And I shall give you some chocolate."

"But, mademoiselle, I could not think of obtruding. And you said that Monsieur your father was absent."

"That does n't make the least difference," said Mademoiselle. "Our house is always open to French soldiers."

"I don't doubt your hospitality, mademoiselle ; but" —

"But nothing at all ; the cook is there, is n't she ? And our chocolate is the best in Martinique," added Mademoiselle insinuatingly.

The officer hesitated. "Well," he said at length, "I will go and take a cup of chocolate, since you are so kind. The men can wait here."

"The men are coming up, too," said Mademoiselle.

"Pardon ! It would be an imposition."

"Nonsense ! We have entertained a whole regiment, we. The men are going to have chocolate, too."

There was a slight murmur of applause in the ranks ; evidently the soldiers had taken kindly to the little girl.

"Mademoiselle" —

But she was not going to lose her advantage. "I command now, monsieur," she said coolly. "About face ! March !" and before the bewildered officer could protest, the whole battalion had actually obeyed Mademoiselle, the soldiers applauding and laughing ; they knew that they were safe

in doing it. Mademoiselle, with the officer, rode sedately after; she did not even turn or wave her hand as the battalion wheeled into the palm avenue; and in two minutes it was out of hearing.

XXXI

GALEON BAY

TOM drew a long breath ; it is not too much to say that he had been badly frightened. M. de la Bourdonier only chuckled, and hurried him on to the entrance of the palm avenue, where Alcide was waiting with the horses ; the soldiers had paid no attention to him.

"My cloak !" whispered Tom ; Alcide handed it to him and he put it on hurriedly. Then they mounted quickly.

"Me been raly fo'git de cloak," said the negro ; "w'en me yere a dem sojers me frighten tel me mos' dead. Dem so chupit [stupid] ! Lilly Manmzell mek dem dus tu'n roun' and ma'ch up to Great House so dey no able fo' ketch missié. Me nebber see nobody befo' like dat lilly Manmzell ; 'he wonnerful en trut' !"

"It was fortunate that she was so quick," said the planter ; "you could not have escaped notice in that narrow place, and the officer had a lantern. It would have been useless to run ; they would have heard us, and perhaps have given chase."

"Mademoiselle *is* wonderful," said Tom, with emphasis ; "she always knows exactly what to do."

"She keeps her wits about her because she is n't afraid," said the planter.

"And she never let on that she knew we were there!" cried Tom enthusiastically.

"Which goes to prove that she is a good actress," said M. de la Bourdonier, laughing. "Now it will be better not to talk."

They rode on rapidly for an hour, Alcide behind. Two or three times they passed travelers, and the planter always returned their "*Bonuit, missié!*" with a pleasant greeting; but no one paid any further attention to them. After a while they saw the lights of the Petit-Robert guard-house, but before they reached it M. de la Bourdonier turned into a narrow path on the left; here they walked their horses, for the path was rocky and dark under the overhanging bushes. M. de la Bourdonier stopped and struck a spark into his tinder-box, holding his watch before it. "Nearly nine o'clock," he whispered; "the patrol will be passing the beach soon; we must be careful."

He dismounted, and told Tom to do the same. "Alcide," he ordered, "you are to take the horses to the road, and back as far as that ranch we passed. If anybody asks you about them, say that you are waiting for M. de la Bourdonier, and that you do not know where he has gone. You may have to wait several hours, but there is no occasion to hide yourself."

"*Oui, missié,*" said Alcide. Tom wanted to say good-by to him, but he thought it would not be wise, because the negro did not know he was

leaving the island ; he had simply been obeying orders. After he was gone, Tom took all the coins from his pocket and begged M. de la Bourdonier to give them to the faithful fellow ; they were English coins, but many such were current in Martinique. The planter readily undertook the commission. Tom gave the knife to M. de la Bourdonier himself, "because it is all I have to give," he said ; and the planter assured him that he would value it all the more.

They walked on cautiously until the path came out on a broad sand-beach ; Tom could hear the lapping of waves, and the salt air came gratefully to his nostrils.

"We must wait," whispered the planter. He led the way quietly along the edge of the thicket, and presently stopped by a clump of broad-leaved "sea-side grapes." These are not vines, but small, gnarled trees, and their spreading branches bend over almost the ground ; they crawled under and were perfectly concealed. "I marked this place before," explained the planter ; "it is close to the road, and we cannot help hearing the patrol, even if we do not see it. Luckily, there are no snakes on the seashore."

"How will you find the path when you are going back?" whispered Tom. "It is such a narrow entrance in all these bushes."

"I shall not return by the path," answered M. de la Bourdonier. "I shall go quietly to the guard-house and say that my servant is just ahead with my horse. My pass will take me through, and

they know me, anyway. Very likely they will think I have been to Trinité ; but it does n't matter."

After that they were silent, and Tom listened eagerly. Ten, twenty, thirty minutes passed ; they seemed hours. He could hear only the lapping ripples on the sand and a distant thunder of surf out on the point. "The patrol is late," said M. de la Bourdonier ; "but we must stay here."

A whole hour went by ; another hour. The planter crept back among the bushes and struck a light for his watch ; when he returned, he whispered that it was nearly eleven o'clock ; but they must wait. Tom knew that his friends were somewhere outside the bay, looking for his signal ; it was dreadful to be so near them and yet doomed to inaction.

A thought flashed across him, and his heart almost stood still. "I forgot about the light we must show," he whispered huskily. "How shall we make it?"

"Hush ! It's all right ; I have a lantern tied to my waist."

Still they waited ; half an hour more. Would his friends go away without him ? No ; they had promised to wait three hours, and he knew he could trust them.

The planter gripped his arm. Crunch, crunch, came footsteps along the sand ; there were men talking.

"Burn me if I enlisted to watch sand-banks," growled one. "Nobody ever comes here at night,

except those fishermen, and they only come once a year."

"Silence, there!" ordered a corporal. "Close up! We shall be at the guard-house directly."

"And get some brandy, I hope, *mon caporal*, and a light for my pipe."

"No brandy for thee, Jacques; thy nose is red enough already."

"Almost as red as thine, *drôle*."

"Shut thy jaws then." Crunch, crunch, went the feet, and there was a glimmer of starlight on muskets.

"I smell an Englishman," said a soldier, sniffing.

"Nay; 't is a dead shark;" and there was a laugh. Any weak joke is acceptable on a night march.

Crunch, crunch. The sounds grew fainter; then ceased.

"They are around the rocks now," said the planter aloud. "We can go down to the beach; your friends will be tired of waiting."

They crawled out from their shelter and went down to the water's edge. M. de la Bourdonier followed it for a quarter of a mile or more, until he came to some grape-trees which were growing close to the tide-mark. "This will do," he said. "There will be nobody passing, anyway; and if there is, our light will be hidden by these trees."

They got between the trees and the water, and M. de la Bourdonier unstrapped the lantern which was hanging from his waist; it was a large lan-

tern, with glass only on one side, the other three sides being of metal, so that the light could not be seen through them. The planter struck a spark into his tinder-box, lighted an oiled wick from it, and blew the wick into a flame; then he lit the lantern-candle, stamped out the oiled wick, and gave the lantern to Tom. "Hold it high," he said, "and show it while you count fifty; then turn it away from the water while you count five slowly; then show it again."

"I know," said Tom, all in a tremble. He held the lantern above his head and turned the glass side toward the entrance of the bay while he counted fifty rather slowly. Then he turned the lantern around and counted five. Then he turned it again. Instantly there were tiny answering flashes, twice, on the left side of the bay.

"Show your lantern again!" exclaimed the planter quickly. "Your friends are inside the bay; they thought they had missed your first signal."

How Tom's heart was beating! He showed the lantern again, twice. Then they waited.

"Here they come!" whispered the planter. "Let them see your lantern."

Tom set the lantern on the sand, with the glass side toward the water; there was a soft swash of muffled oars, and a boat glided dimly into view.

"Ahoy!" Tom hailed softly. "What boat is that?"

"Diamond!"

"Diamond!" cried Tom; and in another in-

stant he was in Ned's arms, and Ralph was by his side, fairly blubbering with joy.

"Get away, quick!" whispered the planter. "Adieu, my friend."

"Oh, I must hug you first!" exclaimed Tom, laughing and crying. "And this is my friend Ned, the best fellow!"

"I do not speak English," said M. de la Bourdonier, taking Ned's hand.

"Oh, hang it! I can't speak French," cried Ned. "Tell him he's a brick and all that, you know;" and Ned wrung the planter's hand. A few more hurried words; Tom handed back the precious cloak and leaped into the boat, followed by Ned and Ralph; and they shot swiftly out into the gloom. The planter held up his lantern and waved his hand before it; then he put it out and was lost to sight.

"Glad we got you at last, Mr. Reeves," said an officer who was seated in the stern; it was Lieutenant Wadham, commanding the boat-crew. "But we must n't talk about it here," he added, in a low voice; "sound carries so far over water. We shall be on the Curieux in half an hour."

"Then that was the Curieux off the bay, sir?" whispered Tom.

"Yes; Bettsworth was almost as anxious about you as Captain Maurice was. Now stop talking." But Ned's tongue was going like a shuttle-cock as he whispered congratulations and chaff and questions and gossip all mixed together.

Have you ever watched the sudden changes of

stereopticon pictures? So suddenly had the world changed for Tom: one moment a fugitive, the next a young hero, among friends who could not make enough of him. Of course, his head was turned a little by all this glory; but through it all came the memory of his kind Martinique friends, of how much they had done for him and how little he had done for himself. That kept his vanity within decent bounds, at least.

There were moments when it was inclined to break loose. As he clambered over the side of the *Curieux*, Captain Bettsworth ran to meet him, quite regardless of naval etiquette; he was taken to the cabin, and praised and toasted and made to tell his story before he was allowed to sleep at all. And in the morning he had to tell it to Ned, and to Ralph and his mates, for the boat's crew were all from the Diamond Rock; Captain Bettsworth had placed his vessel at their disposal for the expedition. There was a fourth conclave on the rock itself, when Tom recounted his adventures to his cousin and was congratulated all over again. Even Commodore Hood sent a very pleasant letter.

Tom learned that he had been missed from the *Curieux* at the end of the first dog-watch after his involuntary departure, and it was soon discovered that the boat had disappeared also. The man at the wheel had noticed him as he climbed over the side, and it was at once surmised that the boat had got adrift, taking him with it. Nobody could guess how long the boat had been gone;

the island currents were not well understood, and opinions varied as to the direction it must have taken. They spent all the rest of the night and all the next day cruising up and down the coast and far to the westward, before they finally gave up the boat as lost; it was generally supposed that it must have been carried far out in the Caribbean Sea, and that Tom had perished of exposure or starvation. His signal flag had been a complete surprise to everybody. "I thought it was some Mounseer trying to bamboozle us," said Ned. "My stars! but when you made that private sign, I most jumped out of my shoes, and the other officers were mighty slow to believe it. Of course, we did n't tell the crew what the game was, but they spotted it somehow and were just wild. When Captain Maurice called for volunteers for a boat party, they knew as quick as a wink that it was for you; and, Tom, every man on the Diamond was hot to be in it; even the cook; Ralph said he'd throw himself over the precipice if they did n't let him go. Tell you what, Tom, there's no use talking about it, you're a base favorite on this sloop. I'd kick about it if I did n't like you so well."

On the whole, I believe that the Martinique adventure improved Tom's character. He sometimes magnified his own exploits; that was natural and boyish. But he magnified M. de la Bourdonier a great deal more, and declared emphatically that his escape was entirely owing to the planter, and to Captain Maurice's signal code,

and to the English friends who were so ready to help him. That was manly. Curiously enough, he hardly mentioned Mademoiselle, and he never showed the cup to the other midshipmen ; he had a notion that they might laugh at the little girl, and something within him said it would be wrong to bring her name into such rough society. That was gentlemanly.

XXXII

A HOSTILE FLEET

TIME passed, and it was two years since Tom had entered the navy. He and Ned were tall lads now, almost sixteen years old; trim and smart, as midshipmen should be, thorough young seamen, and quite competent for the duties of under officers. They could fence well and sight a gun accurately; they understood enough of navigation to take charge of a prize, and, had occasion demanded, could even have manœuvred a vessel in combat with some approach to skill. Tom was a favorite with his superiors because he obeyed orders well, and with his inferiors because he could command without harshness. The boys were still warm friends, and Ralph worshiped them both. They had passed most of their time on the Centaur, cruising among the islands, but with occasional visits to the Diamond, where Captain Maurice was still in command. Eventually, at his cousin's request, Tom had been permanently assigned to the rock "sloop." He was there on a certain eventful day in 1805.

The Diamond batteries had been strengthened, as far as parapets and landings went, but no guns had been added; a large building, called the

"Stone House," was in course of construction, and was already occupied by the officers; the cave at the top of the lower slope had been turned into a blacksmith's forge, and here, also, the cook had his galley. A cistern for rain water, on the top of the rock, had been commenced, but not completed, and at that time it was empty; water was brought in barrels from the ships at the station, or from St. Lucia. It had been found convenient to retain a cable on the southern and precipitous side of the rock, where the guns had been drawn up; the old four-inch "stream hawser" had been taken away, but a smaller one was in its place and was frequently in use. As there were no good landings, the water-barrels and other heavy objects were commonly hauled up in that way.

On the 13th of May, 1805, Captain Maurice and Tom were on the summit of the Diamond Rock. Everything was going on as usual; there was no ship of the line at the station, but the *Curieux* was lying near, having just returned from a cruise, and there was an English frigate several miles away. Captain Maurice was looking out for blockade-runners from France; several sails were in sight to the northeast, perhaps a convoy of merchantmen, and they were evidently approaching. The captain studied them carefully with his telescope; suddenly he closed it with a jerk.

"That is no convoy," he said; "they are ships of the line, and French, I think. Mr. Reeves, take a boat, row across to the corvette, give Captain

Bettesworth my compliments, and say he must be prepared to leave at a moment's notice ; tell him to signal to the frigate. At present Bettesworth will do well to send an officer to the Diamond, who can see with his own eyes and report ; there may be important news to carry to Barbados."

Tom touched his cap, and was scrambling down the rock in a moment. Half an hour later he returned with Captain Bettesworth himself ; that officer was still in command of the Curieux, Lieutenant Reynolds having died of his wounds. They climbed the rock together, and as they went they could see that the whole northeastern horizon was covered with sails. Captain Maurice looked very grave as he shook hands with the visitor.

"They're French, beyond a doubt," he said ; "or there may be some Spaniards among them. My idea is that it's Villeneuve's fleet, from Toulon."

"The one Nelson has been looking for in the Mediterranean ?" asked Captain Bettesworth.

"Yes ; you know there was a rumor that Villeneuve had passed Gibraltar. It could be no one else except Ganteaume, and if he had escaped from Brest, we should have heard of it."

"Perhaps you are right," said Captain Bettesworth thoughtfully ; he had been looking at the approaching vessels with his glass. "At any rate, it's a French fleet, and a big one ; twelve sail of the line at least, and heaven knows how many frigates and sloops. Whew !"

"Well," said Captain Maurice ruefully, "I sup-

pose you'll have to leave. I wish I could go with you."

"You would almost seem justified in abandoning the rock."

"What! without a blow? No, sir! I was put in command of the Diamond Rock, and my duty is to hold it to the last extremity. Besides, I don't even know that the rock will be attacked; and if it is, it is practically impregnable. It may be of the utmost importance to keep a force here; I shall stay."

"Pardon me, Maurice!" exclaimed Captain Bettesworth, extending his hand; "I spoke thoughtlessly, and you are right. Do your duty, man; and, by Jove, we'll do all we can to help you."

The two officers grasped hands warmly. "It's all right, Bettesworth," said Captain Maurice; "tell the admiral that he can depend on us. And tell him, above all things, to throw in a supply of water if he possibly can; it is what we need most."

"I have only a barrel or two; you can take that, of course, and I will send it over at once; we were going to run over to St. Lucia for water to-night or to-morrow. And look here, Maurice, I'll throw in a supply of water if I possibly can. Anything else?"

"Well, our supply of ammunition is pretty good; a little more musket powder might be useful. But what we really need is water."

"I'll send over what we have at once; the fri-

gate could n't get here in time. Anything I can do for you?" he asked, turning to Tom.

"Only to let my mother know — if — if anything happens," said Tom.

"Cousin Tom," said Captain Maurice, "I don't feel quite right about keeping you here; there is no real necessity, perhaps."

"But I prefer to stay, sir," said Tom quietly. "Shall I go with you to bring off the water, sir?" he asked Captain Bettesworth.

"By all means; and — Mr. Reeves, you're a brave fellow! I knew you would n't funk."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom, reddening a little. Then the two captains shook hands, — both of them silent because neither quite dared to speak, — and Bettesworth hurried off to the corvette with Tom. There was only one barrel of water to be had, as it turned out; and while this was being lowered into the boat the captain invited Tom to his cabin.

"Mr. Reeves," he said, "I have only cruising orders, and can go where I please. If this fleet is coming to Martinique, — and I think it is, — the Diamond will be blockaded. I shall try to keep about the channel between here and St. Lucia; that is, of course, unless I get orders to the contrary; the frigate will go to Barbados, and she can take information about this fleet. It is better for me to stay, anyway, and try to pick up more news; and it will be safe enough if I keep near the St. Lucia side; this corvette could throw out a towing line to anything in the French navy. And

I want Maurice to understand that he has a friend somewhere about."

"He knows that already, sir," said Tom. The boy had a quiet manner, which nearly always goes with steadiness; he had lost much of his vanity, and had gained correspondingly in self-reliance. In brief, he was growing to true manhood.

Tom returned to the rock with the water, and a case of wine which Captain Bettesworth had thrown in at the last moment; soon after, the corvette spread her sails and ran southwest before the wind, the frigate following her example. The naval station was deserted; except, alas! for the Diamond Rock, which was moored fast to the bottom. Besides Captain Maurice, his two lieutenants, and Tom, there were one hundred and nine effective men on the rock, including some twenty marines.

Meanwhile, Captain Maurice was scanning the fleet as it approached; he counted no less than sixteen ships of the line and thirteen frigates, corvettes, and store-ships — an enormous concourse. Among them were several Spanish vessels; at that period Spain was in alliance with Napoleon. It was a long time before they were abreast of the rock, for the wind was light, and the rate of sailing of a fleet is the rate of the slowest. Captain Maurice sent Tom to the lower batteries with orders to fire if the ships came near enough.

It was a grand sight as the fleet turned into the passage and bore up for Fort-de-France. The decks were thronged with sailors and marines, and groups of officers examining the Martinique

shores and the Diamond. A few vessels ventured to pass within cannon-range, much to the joy of the waiting gunners; gun after gun roared the Diamond's defiance to all Frenchmen, and Ralph slapped his leg as he saw the splinters flying from a three-decker. "Larn 'em as this 'ere sloop don't want no wisitors," he remarked grimly. The venturesome ships sheered off, and the others gave the rock a wide berth.

During the night another vessel was seen dimly, apparently in the track of the fleet; but the next day passed quietly, and the next; two or three French frigates were hovering near, and with a telescope they could make out the *Curieux* under the St. Lucia shore. Once a group of officers appeared at the Martinique lookout station, examining the Diamond with their telescopes, but this was a common occurrence; a battery of heavy guns had been erected there some months before, but its attempts to bombard the rock had been laughable failures. Tom and his friends felt secure enough. They noticed, however, that the guards at the landing had been strengthened. Orders were issued restricting the allowance of water, and this caused a little discomfort; not much, because the men were not working hard, and the rock, being exposed to constant sea-breezes, was cool and pleasant. By Captain Maurice's advice, the men took frequent plunges in sea-water.

Early on the morning of the 16th — three days after the appearance of the fleet — a line-of-battle ship was seen approaching from the eastward.

Captain Maurice was standing with Tom on the summit of the rock, by the flagstaff. "She is Spanish, by her build," said the captain. "We must try to fool the Dons."

At that moment the approaching ship threw out a Spanish flag. Captain Maurice ordered a French one to be shown; "I don't like it," he said, "but it is a common ruse; the fellows may not know that the rock is fortified, or they may suppose the French have taken it. Mr. Reeves, go down and tell the men to conceal themselves in the batteries; but have the guns ready."

Tom delivered the message, and shortly after the Spanish vessel rounded to under the lee of the rock, not half a mile away. Down came the French flag from the Diamond, and the English bunting flew out in its place. Ralph, grimly squinting along his gun, was waiting for the word.

"Let 'em have it!" shouted the captain; and the word ran from battery to battery. Ralph sprang back, the great gun belched fire and thunder, and a ball splintered the ship's bow; two others followed from the upper batteries, tearing through the rigging. The vessel shifted her helm quickly, but she was almost becalmed, and it was twenty minutes before she escaped towards Fort-de-France, with ragged sails and two great holes in her side.

But the Diamond was closely blockaded: always one or two frigates kept watch of the rock at a safe distance, and sometimes there was quite a little fleet of brigs, schooners, and even pinnaces

and rowboats. The *Curieux* was nearly always in sight, but hitherto she had been unable to throw in supplies.

On the morning of the 25th of May nearly everybody on the *Diamond* was anxiously gazing southeastward at a little sloop which was trying to make the rock. It seemed a hopeless undertaking by daylight, and against such odds, for there were two French frigates and a swarm of lesser craft on guard. But Captain Maurice knew that the attempt would be made; knew, also, that the sloop had been dispatched by Captain Bettesworth, for on the preceding day they had conversed by means of the flag-signals, at a distance of eight miles. The sloop contained water and ammunition.

"Is the man crazy?" exclaimed Lieutenant Wadham; "he is running straight on the frigate!"

The commandant shook his head and continued to watch the sloop through his glass. Suddenly she turned toward the St. Lucia shore. The two frigates stood off to intercept her, but their great sails could not be trimmed so quickly, and the sloop, with the usual northeast wind in her favor, gained perceptibly. Tom watched the chase with breathless interest. As the frigates gathered way they gained in turn, until one of them was directly west of the sloop and the other northwest, hardly two miles distant.

"She comes about!" exclaimed one of the lieutenants excitedly. "She's heading straight for the rock again! no; for the passage!"

In fact, the sloop had adopted precisely the tactics which had been used so successfully by blockade-runners before the occupation of the Diamond; having drawn the enemy southward, she was now making for the passage north of the rock, with the wind in her favor. "Hurrah!" cried an under-officer in a fever of delight. "She'll outwit the Mounseers yet."

Flash! Flash! went the guns of the northernmost frigate, and she was half hidden in smoke before the watchers on the rock heard the rattle of her broadside; but the balls only splashed around the little sloop, and she kept bravely on her course. The Diamond was cheering wildly; only Captain Maurice was silent, for he knew that the worst danger was yet to come. For a dozen French schooners and sloops were tacking between the Diamond and the chase, and the frigates were closing up behind her. Every gun on the rock was manned, but they could do nothing at that distance.

And now began such a contest of pluck and skill against numbers as even British warfare has rarely seen. The very multitude of the French vessels put them at a disadvantage; they blundered and lost time, and one schooner even fouled another in endeavoring to head off the chase. Most of them were armed only with swivels, and those which had larger guns could not bring them to bear, or fired wildly. The little sloop dodged and skimmed and circled by the enemy, never using her one gun. Half the pursuers were behind

her, and she was nearing the passage; already Tom, in command of the Centaur battery, had planted a ball in a French sloop, and the other cannons began to speak. Even Captain Maurice looked hopeful.

Alas! At the supreme moment a schooner, running the Diamond's fire, bore right down on the sloop; there was a confused struggle, the roar of guns and rattle of small-arms, with half a dozen vessels in a cloud of smoke; and then — the tri-color over the cross of St. George! Ralph threw down his rammer with an oath, and Lieutenant Wadham groaned aloud.

Well, it was the fortune of war: a gallant attempt defeated, as many another has been. Captain Maurice spoke to the men cheerfully. "Never mind, my lads," said he; "we have the Diamond yet, and can stand a long siege. We'll give the fellows a lesson yet!" The men cheered,—English and American sailors always cheer when things look darkest, — and resigned themselves to what fate might bring.

They had need of courage and patience. The frigates stood off and on, occasionally venturing near enough to pour a harmless broadside against the rock; the English replying with such guns as could be brought to bear. Twice, at least, a well-directed shot entered a French hull; and after a while the frigates drew off, taught too well that they had little chance against such a fortress. But the crowd of small craft remained, and the English had to watch their landings day and night.

XXXIII

THE DEFENSE OF THE DIAMOND ROCK

JUST before nightfall on the 29th of May a formidable squadron stood out from Fort-de-France: two ships of the line, a frigate, a brig, a schooner, and eleven gunboats, carrying, as afterwards appeared, no less than two hundred and fifty-five cannon, many of them of heavy calibre.

"My eyes!" growled Ralph. "Boney, he 'ave larned the walley o' this 'ere heart-o'-stone sloop. Blest if he ain't sent his whole navy for to saloot us, with the Jack Spaniards to look on and yell; not to mention a conwoy o' prowisions, and a floating orspital, mos' likely, and I dessay half a dozen fire-ships to drift down onto the Diamond and turn us into a blazin' wolcano."

Tom regarded the armament with silent dismay; it was clearly intended for an attack on the rock, and it seemed preposterous to suppose that they could defend themselves against such a force. The lieutenants looked worried. Only Captain Maurice was calm and determined; he ordered his men to get such sleep as they could, keeping only the usual watch, for it was clear that the enemy, coming against the wind, could not approach them that night.

In fact, it was seen in the morning that they had drifted far to leeward. Then the wind veered, and the squadron passed the rock, almost within gunshot. Meanwhile, the sailors on the Diamond were busy carrying all the provisions and drinking water to the upper batteries, for Captain Maurice had resolved to abandon the base of the rock and the slope. So another night passed, the French and Spanish vessels remaining near under easy sail.

The morning of the 31st dawned anxiously on the little garrison: every man at his post above, but the lower slope deserted except by Ralph and one other; they had been left to fire the two lower guns before leaving them. These guns were trained on the paths by which the enemy must ascend from the landings, and they were loaded to the muzzle with grape-shot and bullets.

For now the squadron was approaching, coming on beautifully with the wind; gunboats and launches full of soldiers behind the great hulls: three thousand men and more, and fifteen hundred detailed for an attacking force. To meet these, a hundred and eleven men waited, far up the frowning rock; and two men stood grimly at the lower guns, with lighted matches in their hands.

One of the ships forged ahead, and the battle began with her broadside as she poured a storm of balls over the lower slope; the two men stood like statues, unharmed. Then a crowd of boats darted out and made for the two possible land-

ings. Lieutenant Wadham, with Tom and some twenty sailors, had crawled over to a little hollow directly above the main landing ; and the minute the boats appeared they opened upon them with a hot fire of musketry, wounding half a dozen and killing one. To make matters worse for the French, the southerly wind had raised a dangerous sea, even on this sheltered side of the rock ; the boats jammed each other, their oarsmen were cursing, and the soldiers were half fearful before the unaccustomed danger. Still, several hundred managed to leap ashore, and some of them were firing up at Lieutenant Wadham and his men.

Then Tom noticed some old barrels and a pile of loose stones. Hastily directing the men to fill the barrels with stones, he rolled one to the edge of the hollow and sent it crashing down on the boats. An instant after he would have given worlds to recall his own act. Half the stones rolled out and flew down, a hundred feet, on the soldiers, felling a dozen ; the barrel itself bounded off a cliff and went sheer through the bottom of a launch, killing a sailor in its passage and leaving fifty men struggling in the water. "Up with another!" shouted Wadham, and Tom shut his eyes, but heard the crash and the shrieks. By this time almost every man on the Diamond was firing or hurling stones and cannon-balls over the landings. The French were brave men, veterans of Italy and Egypt, some of them, but flesh and blood could not stand it. Two hundred more soldiers got ashore, and then the boats were

forced to put off without landing provisions or scaling-ladders.

Meanwhile, the men on shore were advancing at a run; but right in their faces were the two twenty-four pounders with their grim watchmen. There was a flash and roar; then another; hurtling balls, screams and groans and curses. Oh, war is a frightful thing, a devilish thing; pray God that the day may come when scenes like that are impossible! Tom turned sick for a moment; the carnage was too awful. The gunners did their duty, you say. True, my boys; and there was a gallant French captain, with gallant fellows behind him; they were doing their duty too; and what of their widows and orphaned children? In after years Tom used to say that his hatred of war dated from that day.

But there was no time for pity; the slope was swarming with soldiers. "Look alive, men!" shouted Captain Maurice. Ralph and the other cannoneer scrambled up over the lower cave, and twenty strong hands dragged away the ladder, while the rest poured down a hot fire. Still the French came on gallantly to the top of the slope; there they were barred by a sheer precipice, with stones and lead and iron raining down from above. Luckily for them, the overhanging rock and the building called the "Stone House" offered some shelter; so they crouched there, safe for the moment.

"Blest if the bloomin' cook been't down below!" ejaculated Ralph. "I seed the lubber an' sung

out, but he was scared most to death, an' a-tryin' to bore into the innards o' the rock." It was too true! The cook had gone down, at the last moment, to rescue some forgotten saucepan; and presently the laughter of the French told that he was captured.

But the battle was still hot. For a time the whole fleet stood close in to the Diamond and hurled broadside after broadside against it; a useless waste of ammunition, for the English, on the natural terraces of the rock, had only to draw back a little or lie down, and they were perfectly covered. They had now only three cannons, but whenever one of these could be brought to bear, it was used most effectually; there were many splintered holes in the hostile vessels before they drifted into the offing.

So far, the fight was clearly in favor of the English; not a man of them had been hurt, but almost fifty of the attacking party were killed or wounded, and the rest were in a terrible plight: cut off from their boats, exposed almost to certain death if they ventured out on the slope, without food, and with no water but some putrid stuff by the blacksmith's forge, which had been left there as useless. Even the bombardment by the fleet made matters worse for them, the balls and loosened rocks rolling down over their heads. They had dragged their wounded under the sheltering rocks, but could do nothing more for them.

The English had food, but, alas! hardly any water; and they had to work and fight every

minute under the blazing tropical sun. The enemy would give them no rest. Once, as Tom was watching above the "Stone House," he was astonished to see a string of soldiers clambering around at his right; they had thrown ropes over some trees and so scaled the cliff, and were making their way slowly to a better position, clinging to the bushes and grass as they climbed. The middy's shout brought a dozen stout sailors to his back; and there the two parties fought, on a slope so steep that they could get no footing, but had to cling with one hand and use cutlass or pistol with the other; if a man fell, he rolled over the precipice. Here the English had a man killed and another wounded, but the French, who were below them, suffered far more; once a score of them were captured, but their comrades rescued them the next moment. The French were driven back at length, but their attack had proved that this part of the rock was vulnerable.

Night came, but it brought no relief to the tired little band: all hands were engaged in guarding the steep slope above the lower cliff, and a dozen times the French had almost carried it. They dragged out boards and a stairway from the Stone House, and set them against the cliff; they threw up ropes; they ran out below and fired at the defenders, and sprang back before the shots could be returned. Moreover, in the darkness, some provisions and water had been landed, with a large reinforcement, and the wounded had been removed. In the morning, and all day at inter-

vals, the bombardment from the fleet was renewed, but for this the English cared little ; it was the force below them, now quite a thousand strong, that menaced their destruction. Their numbers gave the French a great advantage, for their attacking parties could relieve each other every moment ; the defenders, ready to drop with fatigue and thirst, were engaged all the time. Another night ; the men fought on wearily, and more than one dropped asleep amid the yells of combat.

It was noon on the third day of the attack. Tom had thrown himself down in the middle battery, utterly worn out, aching in every joint, black with powder, and with the terrible grip of thirst at his throat ; he had had but one small cup of water that day. They were fighting below him ; he knew that scaling-ladders were being landed ; and at that instant came the cry that a strong party of French had gained a footing above the lower cliff. The lad got on his feet slowly and felt for his pistol as Captain Maurice hurried up, still grave and determined.

"Tom, my boy, I want you to find how much ammunition we have left ; ball cartridges, I mean ; there is plenty for the batteries."

"Yes, sir," said Tom hoarsely.

"Here, drink a bit first ; you are half dead with thirst, I know ; but we must hold out if we can."

The commandant handed him a flask of water mixed with wine ; Tom drank eagerly, and the draught gave him a momentary strength. Then

he dragged himself to the ammunition chests. Empty !

In alarm, he hurried from post to post and questioned the men. Some had cartridges—a few; some had none : perhaps three rounds to a man if they were evenly divided. One poor fellow fainted dead away while Tom was speaking to him ; he was overcome with heat and the terrible thirst. Sadly the boy returned and reported.

Captain Maurice heard him in silence, but with such a face of anguish as Tom hoped never to see again ; then he sent for the two lieutenants. When they arrived, he stated the situation, briefly but frankly :

“Gentlemen, we have hardly a drop of water, and not enough cartridges to last until night. The enemy are constantly being reinforced ; they are ten to one now, and I believe they have landed scaling-ladders. We have lost only one killed and two wounded : a trifle compared with what the enemy has suffered. We could retire above the upper cliff and hold our own for days yet if we could live on air. But our men are dropping with fatigue, and, I repeat, there is no water. I ask your advice.”

“We have made a brave fight, sir, but we can do nothing more,” said Lieutenant Wadham. The other only nodded and turned away his head.

“Gentlemen, I thank you. God save the King ! Quartermaster, show a white flag.”

And Tom flung himself on the ground and cried like a child.

XXXIV

THE CABLE

TOM cried — as even men will, sometimes — from sheer exhaustion. Lying there, with his head on his arms, he fell asleep. It was half past four o'clock when Captain Maurice awakened him.

“Drink this,” said the captain, handing him a brimming cup of water ; and Tom gulped it down eagerly. “The French commander sent it,” explained the captain. “He was very civil, and we are offered honorable terms, which I shall accept : officers and men to be paroled and sent to Barbados. Now go to the quarters and get your supper. And, Tom,” he added in a low voice, “you may have some hard work to do yet. Don't say anything about it, but eat rather a light supper and take only one glass of wine ; join me at the Diamond Battery in half an hour. I am glad you got some sleep.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Tom ; “I will be there.” He wondered within himself what Captain Maurice wanted of him ; but Tom had learned to obey and to take things as they came. He made an excellent supper with the other officers, who, of course, were talking about the capitulation.

“The terms could n't be more favorable,” said

Lieutenant Wadham. "Officers to retain their side-arms and personal property, and to be paroled at once and sent to Barbados on a flag of truce; men released on the officer's parole, and they are to march to the Queen's Battery with drums beating and colors flying before laying down their arms. The French officers were very polite; they sent a day's supply of water and a case of wine, though we have n't capitulated yet. Their commander said it was no shame to surrender, after such a defense; and he's about right. I'm sorry for Captain Maurice, though; it nearly broke his heart."

"I suppose he will be court-martialed, having lost the sloop," said another.

"Of course; but there is no occasion for him to worry about that, because the court is certain to exonerate him. Fact is, Maurice has an awfully high sense of duty; it goes above the heads of most of us. I really believe he would be capable of holding out for another week, without any water; but he knows the men could n't do it. He surrenders simply to save the poor fellows from suffering, which would be useless because we should have to give in, sooner or later."

"I wish he had waited a day or two," said the other lieutenant.

Tom found much the same feeling among the sailors, who were quietly eating their supper in the battery; there was some grumbling, but, on the whole, a general sentiment that Captain Maurice had done the best he could. The captain

was well liked, though his reserved and stiff manner had given him the reputation of being something of a martinet.

The sun was setting when Tom climbed to the Diamond Battery, on the summit of the rock ; he was refreshed by his sleep and a good supper, and felt ready for anything. The battery occupied a space which had been leveled off and surrounded by a low parapet, with the two great guns looking over it. Captain Maurice was sitting on a gun-carriage, looking haggard and thin, with dark hollows under his eyes, for he had slept little during the preceding days. There was no one else in the battery.

"Cousin Tom," said the captain, laying one arm over his midshipman's shoulder, "I asked you to come up here because I wanted to talk with you alone : for that, and another reason. I want you to speak frankly, as to a relative ; I am still your captain, but after all, we're members of the same family."

"I have always felt that, sir," answered Tom. He was intensely sorry for his cousin.

"In one way, then, we talk officially, but in another way as relatives ; so don't stand too much on etiquette."

"I understand, sir."

"Now, I want you to mark my words. You are not a prisoner."

Tom looked up in surprise.

"I mean that I have not yet signed the capitulation, though everybody knows that I shall do

so to-morrow morning. But at present you are free, and an officer of the King's navy."

"Well, sir," said Tom, "I suppose I am not a prisoner now ; but I shall be to-morrow morning."

"That remains to be seen. Tom, are you willing to undertake an important service?"

"I'm willing to do anything for you, sir, or for the men, or for England. I"—

"Wait! Don't promise until you understand what the service is. It is dangerous ; and it is a responsible service."

"I think you can trust me, sir," said Tom quietly.

"I do trust you. I could order you to do this work, but I prefer to have you volunteer ; that is, if you think it right to do so."

"What is the service, sir?"

"It is to carry some information — important information, I think — to the Curieux. She is in the channel, over near the St. Lucia shore ; at least, she has been there every night since the assault commenced ; Bettesworth has shown a blue light so that we could know he was at hand. He is a noble fellow to stand by us so."

Tom's heart was beating high. "You wish me to carry a paper to the Curieux?" he asked.

"No : that is precisely what I wish to avoid. If I were going to send a paper, I might intrust it to Ralph Dempsey ; but writing would be too risky ; the information must go by word of mouth. Ralph could carry it, but he is only a forecastle officer, and might not obtain credence. You are a mid-

shipman, Bettesworth knows you, and he would believe you implicitly. But I have arranged for Ralph to go with you."

"Well, sir," said Tom, "I am willing to carry the information if I can; but I confess it seems impossible. I should have to get through the French lines at the base of the rock, and then find a boat, and then avoid the ships" —

"No; my plan is different. Now, remember again that you are in no sense a prisoner before the capitulation is signed; you have a perfect right, as an honorable officer, to fight the French or carry information, — anything that you could have done yesterday. I wish to impress this on you because you might have scruples. The capitulation has not been signed, and I could still refuse to sign it and go on fighting; I have made no promise."

"I understand that, sir."

"Now, about this information. The fleet was really Villeneuve's, as I thought, and some of his ships have been attacking us. Probably Nelson is on his track; he was chasing him, and he will hang on until he catches him and forces a fight; it is Nelson's way. And Nelson, if he is within reach, ought to know of Villeneuve's movements as soon as possible; in any case, Cochrane should know." Admiral Cochrane was in command of the British vessels in the West Indies, having relieved Commodore Hood some weeks before.

"I see that, sir," said Tom.

"Of course, Villeneuve did n't come to the West

Indies just to take the Diamond Rock. No doubt he is going to attack some of the British islands ; my idea is that he 's going to Jamaica."

Tom nodded.

" Well, Lieutenant Wadham, when he went to arrange the terms of capitulation, was chatting with some French officers, and he got positive information that Villeneuve is embarking a large force of soldiers ; nearly the whole garrison of Martinique, and others have come from Guadeloupe."

" That certainly looks like an invasion, sir," said Tom.

" I wish Bettsworth to get that information to-night, if possible. He can then use his discretion about taking the news to Barbados, or to Jamaica ; perhaps he would have time for both."

Tom nodded again.

" And he should be informed as to the strength of Villeneuve's fleet. We counted, on the first day, sixteen sail of the line and a dozen frigates and corvettes. Then there was the one that passed in the night : a frigate, perhaps. And a Spanish ship passed three days later. Possibly more have come down from Guadeloupe. At least seventeen or eighteen ships of the line and more than half as many frigates, besides store-ships and smaller craft. Have you got that right in your mind ?"

" I have often reckoned them up, sir."

" I am glad you did ; if you have a clear notion in your head, you will know what to say. Well, then, Villeneuve is certainly embarking troops, probably to invade Jamaica or some other Eng-

lish island ; and if he takes his whole fleet, he will have about eighteen sail of the line and a dozen frigates."

Tom said nothing. He was wondering how the information was to be carried across the channel to the Curieux.

"If you leave the Diamond to-night, — you and Ralph, — of course the French must not know of it. Your names will not appear at all in the capitulation papers. The absence of a lieutenant might be observed by the French, but they don't even know that there is a midshipman on the rock. In the hurry, none of the men will notice ; and I can trust the officers."

Tom reflected for a moment. "I can see that the information is important, sir," he said, "and I am willing to carry it if I can. But how am I to get to the Curieux? I'm ready to run risks ; but there must be some chance of success, or else I ought not to volunteer."

"It is a dangerous enterprise," said Captain Maurice, "and that is why I don't want you to go into it except as a volunteer, with your eyes open. But it is not the kind of danger you are thinking of, and there is a great deal more than a chance of success. Tom, I want you to go down the cable."

If Tom's face blanched, his cousin could not see it in the gathering darkness ; but he certainly did blanch inside. The cable, stretching diagonally from the top of the Diamond to a rock near its base, was over eight hundred feet long. Men had

descended it — a few sailors who had done the thing out of bravado and had made a boast of it afterward. Tom and Ned had talked of doing it when the cable was first stretched, but neither had quite found courage to make the attempt. When the great guns were raised, many men and boys had worked on the line, but they were supported by tackling, or at least by hand-ropes. Now Tom was asked to descend this terrible cable for the first time, at night, and with no means of holding on except his own arms and legs. But — if he did it for England?

Tom rested his head on his hands and thought. It was characteristic of his growing manliness that he did think before speaking; and it was characteristic, also, that he spoke more clearly and steadily when his excitement was greatest.

“You said that Ralph would go with me, sir.”

“Yes; he will be here directly.”

“You wish us to take the yawl which is hidden at the foot of the rock?”

“It is in good condition, or was before the bombardment, and the French have not noticed it; the sail and some oars are in it. The cable itself is perfectly sound. I don't think you would have much difficulty in evading the French vessels; there are only the two frigates on that side;” Captain Maurice pointed to where the vessels could still be seen through the gathering gloom. “They are far apart, and they will keep a poor lookout to-night because they know that a capitulation has been arranged. And it will be dark;

there is no moon. Even if they see the yawl, they are very likely to suppose it is one of their own boats, because they will never think of an English boat from this side."

"I don't believe we should have much difficulty there; and at worst they could only take us prisoners. You believe that the *Curieux* is over by St. Lucia?"

"Bettesworth has shown two blue lights every night, at about one o'clock; it is an old signal, and he knew I should understand. Probably he will be there to-night; if not, you could run to Castries with the news. The wind is in your favor."

Tom nodded assent. "You believe that this information is really important, sir?" he asked.

"I certainly do, or I should not ask you to take it. How important, we cannot know yet. This is the largest fleet France has ever brought together, and Bonaparte did n't send it to the West Indies for nothing. For all we know, it is as formidable to England as the Spanish Armada was. A single day's warning of Villeneuve's movements may enable Nelson to frustrate his plans; may defeat the French fleet, decide the war. Tom, I would gladly give my life if I could carry that information myself; but you know that I must remain here until to-morrow. After that I may be detained several days before they send us to Barbados; and hours — minutes even — are precious."

Tom leaned his head on his hands again. For England!

"I will go, sir," he said simply.

"God bless you, Tom! I knew you would;" and Captain Maurice grasped his hand. "Well, then, as to details. No doubt the boat is all right; it will be useless to take provisions, because you will succeed or fail before to-morrow morning; but I have a flask of water for Ralph to carry; and here is a small flask of brandy, in case you need to steady your nerves after the cable. You should have a watch; take mine, and this tinder-box and bit of candle; but be careful about showing a light. And here is a pocket compass, in case the night turns cloudy and you can't see the stars; the Curieux will be about due south from the Diamond, but you must make allowance for the current setting in from the Atlantic: say two knots an hour. When you are a mile or so from St. Lucia, look out for Bettsworth's blue light about one o'clock. And oh, by the way, you will find some blue lights in the locker of the boat if you wish to show one. That is all, I think. Have you any money?"

"Only a shilling or two, sir."

"Take a couple of sovereigns, then; I would give you more, but a slight weight in the pocket may tell when you are going down that cable, and Bettsworth will let you have all you need. Here comes Ralph, I think. He does n't know the plan yet, but I told him to meet me at six bells."

The gunner entered the battery and touched his hat. "Are you tired, Ralph?" asked Captain Maurice, rather anxiously.

"Not a bit, yer honor. Ain't done nothen

since the fust watch ; slept most o' the time, an' drunk 'bout three gallon o' water. Goin' to fight 'em agin, yer honor? I'm on deck !"

"No fighting, probably, but an important service. I want you to go down the cable."

"All right, yer honor," said Ralph, without any visible hesitation. "Wot'll I do w'en I'm down?" Ralph had never descended the cable, leaving such foolhardy tricks for younger and less experienced men ; but then, there had been no necessity for it.

"Mr. Reeves will know what to do. He is going with you."

"Down that there cable?"

"Yes."

Ralph shifted his quid in his cheek. "Is it a volunteer party?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then I ain't a-goin'. Beggin' yer honor's parding for it, but — well, fact is, I ain't a-goin', and that 's all they is to it."

"Then I shall go without you, Ralph," said Tom. He spoke in a low voice, but very firmly.

"No, you won't. Look a' here, sir" —

"Ralph," said Tom, "we must go ; it is for the King and England."

"Can't I do it alone, sir?"

"If you could do it alone, I should not send Mr. Reeves," said Captain Maurice. "The service is very important. You are to carry a message to Captain Bettesworth, over near St. Lucia."

"In the yawl?"

"Yes, in the yawl. I have no doubt that you will easily find the *Curieux*; she is there every night."

"Well, then, yer honor gives me a letter and I agrees to hand it to Cap'n Bettsworth; that's all straight."

"No; I cannot write; the message must go by Mr. Reeves, or not at all. Look here, Ralph, it's one of those cases where we are bound to risk our lives if necessary. That message may save England from a great disaster."

"Mebbe so, yer honor. But speakin' as a sailor-man, my notion is as England can take care of herself."

Captain Maurice held his peace, but Tom had an argument left. "Ralph," he said, "Lord Nelson is chasing that fleet that passed us the other day."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Ralph. "Nelson?"

"And if we can get that information to Nelson, it will be of the very greatest use to him; may help him to win a big victory." Tom did n't certainly know that Nelson was in the West Indies, but he did know what Nelson's name was to every British sailor. "And I'm going to carry the information to Nelson if I can," he added; "I'm going down the cable."

Ralph fidgeted and rolled his quid about. "Nelson wants that there news, do he, sir?"

"He would want it, badly, if he had any idea what it was. Now will you go with me?"

"You 're a-goin', anyways, you says?"

"I 'm going, anyway."

"Then, by the Eternal, I 'm a-goin' too!" cried Ralph, slapping his fist into his hand. "I would n't resk you for England, nohow, nor for the King ; but I will for Nelson, God bless 'im !"

Captain Maurice nodded and smiled. He realized that Tom's diplomacy had done more than his appeals to duty ; but the result was the same.

Ralph was all energy, now that he had decided. "W'en do we go, sir?" he asked.

"When it's dark enough so that you will not be seen ; the sooner the better," answered Captain Maurice.

"Then the best time 's now," said Ralph. "It 's plenty dark, so the Frenchers won't see nothen, an' I don't want it too dark. An' look a' here, sir," he added, turning to Tom ; "I 'm a able seaman, an' I knows more 'bout ropes 'n what you does, axin' yer parding ; an' I 'm a-goin' to take command o' this 'ere wolunteer party till we gits to the bottom o' th' cable ; a'ter that I obeys horders, in course. Is that so?"

"It's just what I want, Ralph," answered Tom heartily.

"Well, then, I makes a speech, 'count o' takin' command, don't ye see. You been on the Centaur's torpmasts, ain't ye, sir?"

"Plenty of times," said Tom, smiling.

"And you warn't never afeared?"

"A little at first, perhaps ; but I don't mind it at all now."

"Well, sir, jest you think a bit. If you was to fall off that there torpmast, it ud hurt, would n't it?"

"I imagine it would; if I was n't dead before I got there," laughed Tom.

"That 's right. And if you falls off this 'ere cable, you falls a bit funder, mebbe, but it won't hurt no more 'n wot t' other would."

"That 's so," assented Tom.

"And you ain't a-goin' to fall, if you keeps that in mind. 'Tain't nothen to go down th' cable; you cud go down twenty ropes, one a'ter t' other, s'posin' they wan't no higher 'n the Centaur's masts?"

"I 'm sure I could," said Tom.

"Right you are, sir; and you 're a-goin' down this 'ere cable easy as nothen; w'en you done it, you 'll wonder at yerself 'cause you ever thought it ud be a tough job. 'Tain't the danger; they ain't no danger; it 's wot you thinks inside o' yerself. So jest stop thinkin' it."

"I won't think at all," said Tom.

"Yes, you will, sir; you 'll keep a-thinkin' wot a fancy thing it is to do, an' how Nelson 's a-goin' to clap you on th' back for it, an' make you a leftenant. And you thinks of one or two more hidees. Fust place, 'tain't a straight up an' down rope; it 's slantin', like a stay. Consekently, you mus' n't try to keep on the top side, 'cause you can't, no-ways; you got to climb down under the rope, soon as th' rock 'll let you."

"I know that well enough," said Tom.

"And you mus' n't slide; it's too fur, an' you'd skin yer hands all to spun yarn. Jest you go down steady, hand under hand, an' go middlin' slow. You keeps a good twist on the rope with yer legs; they can slide all right. W'en you gits tired, you stops to rest a bit."

"I understand perfectly," said Tom.

"I knows you does; I was on'y freshin' yer mem'ry, as th' sayin' is. You knows how to climb 'long o' th' best on 'em, sir, if it was me as eddy-cated you. Well, then," — Ralph hesitated a little, — "they's one place as is a bit dangerous if you ain't sartin before'and wot you goin' to do. It's w'ere the cable fouls the rock." The summit of the Diamond was rounded; the cable, stretched over the parapet, lay on the surface, or touched it at intervals, for nearly a hundred feet, until the rock became perpendicular; thence it was clear, descending diagonally, but with only a slight inclination, like the side of a capital letter A. At the bottom it was firmly secured to an iron ring set in a small outlying rock. Being quite taut, as well as very heavy, the cable pressed strongly on the rock wherever it touched it; consequently, a climber on this upper portion would have great difficulty in getting his hands under it, and he could not get his legs under at all. It must be remembered that the cable had never been used directly for hauling up heavy objects, but was a guide on which these objects could slip along as they were hoisted by tackles.

"We always had a hand-rope along the rock

when we were using the cable," said Captain Maurice, "and the sailors who slid down used that. There's plenty of rope here."

"That's all right, yer honor; in course, we got t' let down a hand-rope. I was a meditatin' 'bout th' place w'ere th' cable begins to run clear. Down to there we're atop on it, an' then, right at the most ticklish p'int, we got to git under it. I was n't a-thinkin' 'bout myself; I kin do it easy, in course; but I'd like to inwent a better road for Mr. Tom. Now, if we on'y had two or three fathom o' rope ladder" —

"Why, there's some in that tool-box," exclaimed Captain Maurice. The box—a large affair, used as a receptacle for all sorts of things—was locked, but they quickly forced it open, and found about thirty feet of rope ladder, besides a number of coils of rope and a very large one of harpoon-line.

"Jest the thing!" exclaimed Ralph joyously. He extracted a coil of rope and lashed an end of it to one of the great guns, making sure that the gun-carriage was secure. Then he tossed the rope over the parapet, and it uncoiled itself and lay close to the cable, with the end disappearing over the precipice. He also took a number of bits of rope-yarn from the box and put them in his pocket. Finally, he picked up the rope ladder and examined it carefully. "It's sound," he said, "but it wants some wood bars; ratlins ud sag so, an' make a mess gittin' the feet in. S'pose yer honor won't mind if I use some o' these 'ere handles?"

"Take all you want," said the captain.

Ralph found a cutlass in the box and quickly chopped off the handles of several pickaxes and shovels ; these he fastened as rounds in the ladder, leaving the original ratlines, or rope steps, as they were. Then he secured the ladder to the harpoon-line and let it slide down the rock to the verge of the precipice. "I'm a-goin' down fust to lash it," he said. "Then I'll come up ag'in, an' we kin start fair."

"Better secure yourself with a turn of rope," said Captain Maurice.

"Well," said Ralph, ejecting his quid, "I don't not to say need it, but they's no use reskin' things for nothen, and we wants a good job ; mebbe I cud work a bit faster." Taking another coil of rope, he gave it a couple of turns over the gun and secured the end around his waist. "Now, if yer honor 'll jest ease it off middlin' fast till I sings out to belay, they can't be no haxident," he remarked, as he stepped over the parapet.

Captain Maurice held the rope and let it slip around the gun as Ralph descended, Tom peering after him and ready to pass the word. The darkness was gathering, but he could see the gunner dimly.

"Belay !" came Ralph's voice, and Tom instantly repeated it, but the captain had heard, and was already securing the rope. A few minutes passed, and Ralph called that he wanted about three fathoms more of rope. Captain Maurice let that length slide over the gun, and secured it

again. Shortly after Ralph clambered back to the parapet.

"It's all shipshape," he said cheerfully. "I lashed th' ladder to the hand-rope ; that's better 'n lashin' it to th' cable, 'cause now it's a leetle to one side, and down below it hangs free ; t' other way it ud be atop o' th' cable and awk'ard to git through ; now it hangs jest under th' cable, so it's easy to pass from one to t' other. They was a kind o' hollow in the rock w'ere I fixed one o' the ladder-bars, so the ratlins can't sag nor slant. Nothen could n't be safer."

"Ralph," said Captain Maurice, "I shall not forget this !"

"That 's all right, yer honor. Wait a bit : you'll be wantin' to know w'en we gits down, won't ye?"

"I should, indeed ; but even by daylight I could n't see you from here."

"I knows that. A'ter we been gone, say five minutes, you lets down this 'ere harpoon-line ; I don't want it down yit, 'cause 't ain't good to have too many ropes clost together. Tie a pick or suthin' to it for plumb ; an' let it down kinder slow and soft, so 's not to make a big splash ; they 's plenty line to reach the sea. W'en we gits down, I pulls on the line, and yer honor 'll have holt on it here, so you'll know. Mebbe it'll be a good bit a'ter we leaves here, 'cause I got to git out the yawl fust and pull over to the line."

"That will do capitally," said the captain.

Ralph felt of Tom's arm, to make sure that he

was not trembling, and nodded approval. "You're good oak, sir," he said; "we'll be down that there cable 'fore you knows it, an' Nelson'll make you a hadmiral for it." He made Tom unstrap his pistol, which he secured to his own waist; he also took the small flask of brandy, "'cause you wants to go light," he explained, "an' 'tain't nothen to me." Captain Maurice gave him the flask of water, but at Ralph's suggestion that was secured to the end of the harpoon-line, serving for "plumb." The captain pressed some gold pieces on him, which Ralph refused to take at first, but accepted when he was told that Tom might need them.

"Wait a minute," said Captain Maurice; "Mr. Reeves may as well be secured by a rope until he gets over the side of the rock."

Ralph reflected. "Well," he said, "p'raps 't would be better; 'cept he'll have to git free of it."

"I can do that easily," said Tom; so Ralph secured the rope round his waist, giving it only one turn over the gun. "I goes fust," he said. "W'en I sings out, you comes a'ter, keepin' holt o' th' hand-line; that'll take you to th' ladder. You got t' slide down the rock feet fust; you knows better 'n to try t' walk down, holdin' the rope like you was haulin' on it, marine fashion. Git a good grip on each ratlin w'en you comes down the ladder, an' come kinder slow over th' side, 'cause I'll be jest below."

"Won't it be better for you to go clear down

the cable first?" asked Captain Maurice. "Then you won't shake it for Mr. Reeves."

"Think not, yer honor. Shakin' won't amount to nothen, and Mr. Tom, he'll be glad to know as I'm clost by."

"So I shall, Ralph," said Tom. He started to pull off his jacket, but Ralph stopped him.

"Better keep it on, sir," he said; "you're used to it, an' it'll feel more nateral like. But I'll carry the cap; it ud be in the way."

"Take some brandy before you start, Ralph," said Captain Maurice.

"No, thankee, not here; down below, mebbe, I'll take a small dram. Sarvice, yer honor," and he touched his forelock; but Captain Maurice shook hands with him warmly as he went over the parapet.

"Good-by, sir," said Tom huskily.

"Good-by, and God bless you, Tom! I'll look after your chest and Ralph's. Write to me at Barbados."

They grasped hands, not daring to say more, and Tom stood waiting for Ralph's signal. There was still a glimmer of light, and he could see the gunner's figure dimly as it slid down by the hand-rope until it reached the verge. "All right now," called Ralph, as he went over the edge.

Tom set his teeth, grasped the hand-rope, and went over, lying down on the sloping rock so as to slide feet first. It was easy enough, and he knew that he was perfectly safe with the rope round his waist and his cousin easing it off slowly.

The slope grew steeper, and his feet struck the ladder ; he descended two or three rounds and grasped it with his hands ; then he went slowly over the verge. Tom was too much accustomed to ropes to be either dizzy or nervous, and he had often been on the Centaur's rigging at night. He knew that he could swing to the cable easily and get the proper hold of it ; the rest was merely a question of endurance.

"I'm here, sir," called Ralph from the darkness. "Can you feel th' cable?"

"Yes, it's close to my shoulder ; I can get on it easily."

"Then throw off th' line from yer waist ; take care it don't foul ye now'eres."

Tom loosened the line — it had been tied with one of those knots which are perfectly secure and yet can be unfastened easily — and tossed it away from the ladder. "All right ; it's off," he said.

"Then git on th' cable, keerful."

Tom grasped the cable, first with one hand and then with the other, got one leg around it, and then left the ladder altogether and threw the other leg over the cable. In doing this, he had to turn part way round ; but it was easy, because the ladder was a little nearer the rock than the slanting cable. He was now clinging nearly six hundred feet above the water, and he knew it perfectly well ; but his nautical training had fitted him to stand the test. He was cool, hardly afraid ; and he knew exactly what to do. "All right !" he called to Ralph.

"On th' cable?"

"Yes."

"Then you're over the wust, and down we goes; don't slide, and don't try to go fast; steady, hand under hand. Sing out if you wants to stop."

"All right; I'm coming;" and Tom began to put one hand below the other, sliding with his legs, slowly, down, down. It was so dark in the shadow of the rock that he could see nothing. From time to time Ralph spoke in encouragement; he was moving very steadily, and the cable hardly shook. "All right!" Tom would answer; but his arms began to ache as he transferred his hands, left, right, left, right, down, down, monotonously.

"Better stop a bit," called Ralph. Tom knew well enough how to rest on a rope, throwing the weight on the legs, which are much stronger than the arms; it was harder on the cable on account of its slant, but, fortunately, this was not great. A minute's pause; then down, down again in an endless shifting of hands. Tom counted: left, right, left, right; after a while he lost the count and began again. He hardly felt or heard anything; there were waves beneath, growing nearer, but he was going to climb down, down, ever so much farther, and he did n't care; down, down, down.

"Most there now!" called Ralph cheerily.

"All right!" murmured Tom. Left, right, left, right, down, down, down.

"Just there, sir!"

Tom said nothing.

"Slide!" called Ralph ; but Tom went on changing his hands, down, down. He was vaguely conscious that Ralph had hold of his ankle ; then that his feet were on something, but he changed his hands, left, right ; to go on always, down, down, down.

XXXV

THE PLANS OF THE ENEMY

TOM opened his eyes. He was lying on the rock at the foot of the cable, and Ralph was dropping a little brandy into his mouth. "What is it, Ralph?" he asked drowsily.

"Nothen 't all, sir; we're down, that's all. How ye feelin' now?"

"I'm — so — sleepy!" murmured Tom.

"Go to sleep, then; you can't do no better, sir. Here, I'll put yer jacket under yer head; so. Now, I got to take th' yawl an' git holt o' that there harpoon-line, so's the cap'n'll know. I'll be back d'reckly." But Tom was already fast asleep.

He slept for nearly two hours, and then woke of his own accord; Ralph was sitting placidly by his side. Tom sprang up, in dismay.

"Ralph, how could you let me lose all this time!"

"No harm done, sir. I wanted to come down arly so's we cud have a trifle o' light; 'sides, waitin' ud a made ye narvous. I knowed we'd have to wait here. Gittin' 'bout time to leave, though."

"What time is it?"

"'Bout two bells [nine o'clock]. Feelin' all right, sir?"

"Yes; only a little stiff. What was it? Did I faint?"

"Not a bit on't; you ain't the faintin' kind. You jest went to sleep."

"You don't mean to say that I went to sleep on the cable?" cried Tom, in horror. "How far did I fall?"

"You did n't fall at all, sir," said Ralph, grinning. "You was a standin' on th' rock holdin' to th' cable, an' fust I knows you has yer eyes shet and you don't hear me a-talkin'; on'y your hands keeps a-goin' one under t' other, like you was a climbin' down yit. Can't adzackly say as you was sleepin' 'fore you got t' th' rock; more like you dropped off jest as you come here. 'Twould n't a made no diff'rence; if you'd gone t' sleep on th' cable you'd a climbed down jest the same. I've seen men asleep in the riggin', but they did n't fall none."

"But how strange that I should do it at such a time!"

"No; it's nat'ral, sir. Fact is, you was tired out long o' fightin' an' all. Oncet I seed some men th' same w'en the ship was makin' water fast an' they was wore out at the pumps; they did n't know nothen, but they kep' on pumpin', on'y 'thout puttin' much strength in it. Nater knows w'en a man's got to sleep, an' she gives the hor-der an' he jest hobeys, no matter w'ere he is."

Ralph was right. Tom had been exhausted by

the fight; more than he had imagined, because his short sleep and the water and food had given him temporary strength. When the body is in this state, any rhythmical motion encourages sleep, and that is why men often go to sleep on horse-back, or walking. The regular, constant transfer of his hands had made him sleepy, though it is doubtful if it had quite overcome him until he was at the foot of the cable. No doubt, had he fallen asleep above, he would still have descended in safety, transferring his hands and sliding as if he had been awake; but a sudden stop or jolt might have caused him to lose his hold.

Ralph advised him to take a dip in the sea. "Time enough yit," he said. "Nothen like salt water a'ter a fight or a climb; but don't stay in more'n a minute." Tom followed the prescription, and it made a new man of him; he felt capable of going up the cable. But in reality, his two hours of sleep had done him more good than anything else could.

"I telegraphed to th' cap'n," said Ralph; "jerked the harpoon-line, an' cap'n, he jerked back, an' I fished out the flask of water, an' cap'n drew up the line, so he knows it's all serene. You commands now, an' I'm thinkin' we'd best be movin'; my hidee is to slip east'ard long as we're under the rock; an' then run 'bout south; more eastin' we makes th' better wind we gits for crossin'. I dis-kivered some charcoal — sailors been makin' a fire — an' I blacked the sail good so 's it won't show white. Boat's all sound."

The yawl was lying by the side of the rock—a small, sloop-rigged craft, which had been kept near the foot of the cable because it was convenient there, and abandoned when the rock was assaulted because it was out of reach; as it was hidden in a little cove, the French had not noticed it. Tom knew it was a stanch sea boat, and better for their purpose than a larger vessel. A steady east wind was blowing; once past the frigates, they had nothing to fear.

For the present they did not hoist the sail; their object was to get as far east as possible, and to do this against the wind, oars would be better; but it was necessary to muffle them to prevent creaking in the rowlocks. As the quickest means of doing this, Tom pulled off his stockings and wrapped them round the oars; being of wool, they made an excellent muffle. Ralph shipped the oars, Tom took the tiller-lines, and they pulled softly out. The night was overcast and very dark, the best possible weather for such an expedition.

They worked eastward until they were beyond the rock, the oars dipping noiselessly in the quiet water; then Tom put the head of the boat south. "Shall I git the sail up, sir?" whispered Ralph.

Tom reflected. "Not yet," he said; "we're much more likely to be seen. Pull until we get to leeward of the frigates. This boat is so small and dark that it will never be noticed unless there is a sail against the sky."

"Right you are, sir," said Ralph. Both the frig-

ates had lights; they were about half a mile from each other and a mile from the rock. Tom steered so as to pass between them, rather nearer to the easternmost. The boat crept on.

"Sh!" whispered Tom; and Ralph held the oars poised. The steady beat of a man-of-war's boat came through the darkness and passed them; there was a hail, and an answering hail from the frigate; a lantern was held over the vessel's side as the boat swept up.

An officer in the boat said something in Spanish and was answered in the same language. The voices came clearly enough, as voices will over the water; but Tom did not understand Spanish, and caught only the words "*mañana*," "*norte*," "*Dominica*," "*espere*," "*almirante*." Ralph still poised his oars, and the current was drifting them slowly away from the frigate. The man-of-war's boat pulled eastward, perhaps to vessels which were lying in that direction.

"All right now," whispered Tom; and Ralph resumed his oars. In ten minutes they were past the frigates and had their sail up.

"Lucky we did n't run afoul o' that there boat," remarked Ralph; "an' mighty lucky we did n't carry no sail, 'cause they 'd a seed it, bein' so clost to the water."

"Yes," said Tom. "I wonder what they were talking about," he added.

"The Dons, sir? I knows their lingo a little; sarved long o' Jack Spaniards 'fore now. 'T was a hossifer as was sayin' adoo to some messmate

o' his'n; said his ship's hordered north'ard to-morry, an' he's to wait for the hadmiral on the looard side o' Dominica."

"Dominica!" cried Tom; "I heard that, too." He made Ralph translate the conversation, word for word, as far as he could remember it; but he could elicit nothing further except that the speaker had said he would see his friend again in two or three days. "The admiral" might mean Ville-neuve, or the commander of the Spanish ships; anyway, it seemed probable that some of the enemy's vessels were going northward; but for what? The most important English possession in that direction was Antigua, and it was only a small colony. The French fleet might, indeed, take that route for Jamaica, but it would be an unnecessary and tedious detour.

Tom ran directly southward; as the stars were hidden, he consulted the pocket compass from time to time, lighting the tinder-box to read it; but the wind itself was a sufficient indication of their course. By midnight the mountains of St. Lucia began to loom dimly before them. As Tom did not wish to approach the land too closely, they turned eastward, with the sail close hauled. After a while they drifted with the current, keeping the boat's head to the wind.

"I'm thinkin' I can make out suthin' astarn, sir," said Ralph in a low voice; "shall we run down a bit?"

Tom peered over the stern, and fancied he could make out a vessel's sails dimly; but with the

shadowy background of mountains he could not be sure. He shifted the helm, and they ran before the wind a little way.

"It's a brig," he whispered ; "perhaps the Curieux, but we can't be sure. She's lying to. We'll wait for the blue light ; Captain Bettesworth has always shown it at two bells, and it's nearly that now."

Ralph noiselessly lowered the sail and shipped his oars, paddling softly to keep them from drifting away. They waited so for half an hour ; once they thought they heard voices.

Suddenly a spark appeared, and then a blue flame rose. The water, the vessel's sails, the men standing on her deck were blue, a strange, weird light, yet perfectly distinct. For two minutes it continued ; Tom and Ralph could see each other's faces, though they were a quarter of a mile from the light ; but they knew that the men on the corvette could not see them. Then the flame flickered down, and was gone as suddenly as it had come.

"It's the corvette right enough !" cried Ralph exultingly ; "could n't a been plainer."

"It is certainly a brig corvette," said Tom ; "but we may as well be certain. She always shows two lights."

As he spoke, another blue flame flared out, stronger even than the first ; the vessel was burning lights to be seen ten or twelve miles away.

"We'll answer them," cried Tom. The material

for a blue light—a chemical, commonly burned on an iron plate in those times—was in the locker, and he had it out in a moment. The little pile on the plate was easily lighted from his tinder-box, and in a moment they were in a glare of blue.

“Get the sail up, Ralph,” ordered Tom; “we’ll run down and hail.”

The sail was up in half a minute, and they were running toward the corvette. Tom burned another blue light. He cautioned Ralph not to tell anybody what they had come for, nor that the Diamond had capitulated. “Leave that to me,” he said.

“Ahoy!” came from the corvette; and Tom shouted, “Ahoy!”

“What boat is that?”

“Diamond!” answered Tom quickly; it was an old watchword.

“Who is it?”

“Midshipman Reeves.”

“Come aboard, Mr. Reeves.” It was Captain Bettesworth’s voice, and in another moment Tom was clambering over the side.

“Well met, Mr. Reeves; what is it?” asked the captain.

“I have a message, sir.”

“Come down to my cabin,” said Captain Bettesworth; he nodded to Ralph, and led the way.

As soon as they were below the captain poured out a glass of wine for Tom, but he pushed it aside. “I have some important information from Captain Maurice,” he said.

"Fire away."

"First, the Diamond has capitulated, or will to-morrow morning."

Captain Bettsworth gave vent to some strong language. "After such a glorious defense, too!" he ejaculated; "I saw it all, and got pretty near sometimes; you've been making a volcano of that rock. It's too confounded bad!"

"We did the best we could, sir; the water was all gone and we were nearly out of ammunition. The French had the base of the rock; more than a thousand of them, I should think."

"I know. But poor Maurice! It's an awful blow for him; he had set his heart on holding the Diamond. How is he?"

"He's well, sir; he sent me to you."

"How in Christendom did you come? Did the French let you pass?"

"No, sir; I came down the cable."

Captain Bettsworth stared, and then laughed and clapped Tom on the back. "Must have been an important message if you brought it by that road; hanged if I'd do it. But when I was a midshipman — I don't know. Well?"

"The message is this, sir. The French and Spanish fleet — it's Villeneuve's fleet, from Toulon" —

"I know that."

"Captain Maurice got certain information that Villeneuve is embarking troops at Fort-de-France."

Captain Bettsworth whistled. "To attack some

English colony ; I see. Know how many soldiers are going aboard ?”

“Lieutenant Wadham got the report from some French officers when he was arranging the capitulation yesterday ; according to them, it’s nearly the whole garrison of Martinique. Captain Maurice thinks they’re preparing for an expedition against Jamaica.”

“Or Barbados ; or Trinidad, more likely. What does Maurice want me to do ?”

“He leaves that to your discretion, sir. He thought it would be unwise to risk a written message, but he says you can rely on the information. He thinks perhaps you may warn Jamaica, or Admiral Cochrane at Barbados, or both if you have time.”

Captain Bettesworth pondered. “I might go straight to Barbados,” he said, “but I wish we could get some notion of Villeneuve’s plans. So far, all we can make out is that he’s going to do something. And then, after all, the information is hearsay ; the French officers got it from somebody, and they gave it to Wadham, and Wadham gave it to Maurice, and Maurice to you ; it’s important, but as the story stands it’s too uncertain to use.”

“Wait a moment, sir,” said Tom. “When we were passing the frigates off the Diamond, we overheard something which may be worth your knowing. It was a Spanish vessel, it seems, and I could n’t understand what they said, but Ralph says he did.” Tom recounted the conversation

with the man-of-war's boat, Captain Bettesworth listening attentively. "Yes," he said, "that may be a leader in the right direction. But what in thunder should Villeneuve go north for?"

"That is what is puzzling me, sir," said Tom.

Captain Bettesworth thought a little, and proceeded to question Tom closely about the French fleet, — Tom gave the estimate of the vessels, — about the reported embarkation of the troops, the capitulation, the French forces at the base of the Diamond, the conversation that had been overheard, and so on. After that he summoned Ralph and questioned him, dismissing him with a caution not to gossip with the corvette's crew. Finally he sent for Lieutenant Roberts and had Tom recount the story to him. "What do you think of it, Roberts?" asked the captain.

"Well, sir, I think we should run to Barbados immediately, and inform Admiral Cochrane."

"No," said Captain Bettesworth slowly; "I don't think so; I'm going to find out first where Villeneuve is going, or, at all events, in what direction he is going. When we know that, we shall still have plenty of time to get ahead of him; and half information is no information. Besides, we can get the news to Barbados; I'll write a dispatch to Cochrane, and one of the midshipmen can take it to Basse-Terre and from there to Barbados; Dilling will do."

"He can have my yawl if you wish," said Tom.

"A good idea; I don't like to spare one of our boats. I'll mark the paper urgent, and then Dilling

can have a dispatch-boat at once. Roberts, see to it that he's ready; he may have three men. And, Roberts, get under sail; make it west, and we can drop Dilling nearer to Basse-Terre. After that, northwest; I want to be ten or twelve miles off Fort-de-France at daylight."

Lieutenant Roberts went up to attend to the orders, and Tom rose to leave the cabin. "Mr. Reeves," said the captain, "I'm much obliged to you for this, and I shan't forget it in my report, sir. I congratulate you and Dempsey on your escape from the Diamond; it's enough sight better than being a paroled prisoner."

"I know that, sir," said Tom, smiling.

"Well, Maurice won't need you until he's exchanged; are you willing to stay with me?"

"I should like it very much, sir."

"And I shall be glad to have you. Dilling may not rejoin me for some time; take his place, and I'll get the papers fixed."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now turn in; you need it, and Roberts will see you stowed somewhere. Good-night."

Five minutes later Tom was fast asleep, and when he woke, the sun was well above the Martinique mountains to the east of the Curieux. Nearly all the sails had been taken in, so that the corvette, with her dark hull, could hardly have been visible from Fort-de-France, twelve miles distant. A frigate lay at the harbor's mouth, but no other vessel could be seen.

They remained nearly in the same position;

Tom sleeping much of the time, for the captain had insisted that he should rest himself thoroughly. Midshipman Dilling, before leaving the Curieux, had placed his sea-chest at the newcomer's disposal, and, as it happened, the clothes fitted Tom exactly ; so he was well enough rigged out for the present.

Two or three vessels were sighted, and one of them moved northward along the Martinique coast. As night fell the corvette tacked eastward until they could see the island lights ; but nothing transpired, and at daybreak they were twelve or fifteen miles out again. It should be remembered that the fight on the Diamond Rock had ended on the 2d of June. Tom reached the Curieux at one o'clock on the morning of the 3d, and all that day had been spent in watching Martinique. It was now the 4th of June.

They waited nearly all day ; lookouts were kept constantly on each of the masts, and occasionally Lieutenant Roberts or Captain Bettesworth himself would ascend the rigging with a telescope. It was four o'clock in the afternoon before there were any signs of movement about the island ; then a lookout hailed the deck and said that a sail was coming out of Fort-de-France. The captain was on the crosstrees in thirty seconds ; he was a sailor as well as an officer, and rather noted for his contempt of naval etiquette. Two minutes later he called down, " Roberts, stow those sails and let her drift."

The reefed sails which had been keeping the

corvette in her position were quickly taken in; the vessel, under bare poles, drifted lazily away from Martinique, for the current set in to the Caribbean Sea. Standing on the shrouds, Tom could see dimly that several ships were coming out of the harbor of Fort-de-France; the sun, now near the western horizon, shone on their headsails and made them conspicuous. In half an hour a dozen vessels could be distinguished, apparently crowded close together, though they were really moving one behind the other. After a while other sails appeared in a confused mass, and the first ones began to stream off northward. Tom counted twelve, fourteen, fifteen, and so on to twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four; still there were more coming; twenty-five, twenty-six, and all going north; twenty-seven. They moved slowly, for the wind inshore was light and not at all favorable, and it was nearly night before they were all lined along the coast. Captain Bettsworth came down with a satisfied grin on his face. "Roberts," he said, "when it's dark enough, make all sail for the north; we'll get opposite the passage and have another squint at 'em; can't be too sure. Mr. Reeves, come and grub with me; I want to drink your health, sir."

Tom went to the cabin, and Captain Bettsworth did drink his health several times; but Tom, who was temperate, would take only one glass of wine. "It's Villeneuve's whole fleet," said the captain; "not a bit of doubt of it. Seventeen sail of the line, sir, and perhaps eighteen, and

seven frigates. Now, what the devil are they going north for? That was a good move, your coming off with Maurice's information, and may be it was a thundering sight more important than Maurice thought it was. I'd give something to know where Nelson is."

"Captain Maurice thought he must be in chase of Villeneuve, sir," said Tom.

"I think so, too. Villeneuve and Boney are playing a sharp game, but Nelson's going to beat 'em yet. Here's to his health, and may he live to give these fellows the worst licking they ever got in their lives. Steward, another bottle!" Captain Bettesworth was by no means an intemperate man, as the times went, nor was he given to confiding in young midshipmen. He was simply a rough specimen of the British naval officer, the very opposite of Captain Maurice in his manners; but the two were none the less warm friends. "Bettesworth is one of the best officers in the navy; sound oak, for all his rough bark," Captain Maurice would say. "Maurice swallowed a ram-rod once, but he fights with the musket, sir," was Captain Bettesworth's description of his friend, and he generally emphasized it with an oath or two. Tom liked them both, but copied neither; and here again he showed his growing manliness.

In the morning the *Curieux* was lying west of the passage between Martinique and Dominica; but Villeneuve's fleet — perhaps on account of the light winds inshore — was far behind. It appeared in the afternoon, and before nightfall some of the

leading vessels had moved slowly by the passage and were on the western or leeward side of Dominica. The wind, from the northeast, was very unfavorable for the fleet, and sometimes vessels tacked a mile or two to get a better slant. After dark the *Curieux* drew to the eastward, and at dawn (on the 6th, it should be remembered) she was near the passage; all the officers on deck and waiting impatiently for the day to break. It revealed what they expected: the last of the enemy's ships was trailing past Dominica. Captain Bettesworth closed his telescope with a snap.

"That's enough," he said. "Roberts, run out through the passage and then put her head south-east." He had resolved to carry the news to Barbados, and had waited so long only to make sure that Villeneuve was not making for the Atlantic by the Dominica passage. He could not aid the small English colonies to the north, if Villeneuve was going to attack them; if, on the other hand, he was taking this roundabout way to Jamaica, the swift-sailing *Curieux* had time to get the news to Barbados and still reach Jamaica ahead of the fleet.

With the wind abeam and blowing freshly, they made over forty miles before noon. Then a sail was sighted, directly ahead, but making for the north; Captain Bettesworth changed his course to intercept it, thinking it might be an English vessel with news from Barbados. Half an hour later Lieutenant Roberts descended from the rigging, where he had been with his telescope. "It's

an English brig, sir," he said ; " the Narwhal, I think. Shall I speak her ? "

" Yes ; and if she 's from Barbados, see if anybody knows where Nelson is."

Lieutenant Roberts flew the proper signal, and the brig altered her course to speak the Curieux ; as they approached each other both vessels came up into the wind.

" Narwhal ahoy ! " called Lieutenant Roberts ; " where from ? "

" Barbados, night before last ; we carry dispatches from Nelson."

" What ! " yelled Captain Bettesworth, seizing the trumpet.

" Nelson ; he reached Barbados day before yesterday ; stayed only six hours and then went south after Villeneuve's fleet."

XXXVI

NELSON

"ROBERTS," said Captain Bettesworth rapidly, "get that gig over like a magazine afire! put your best men in her." Then he called through the trumpet, "I'm coming across, Bates; you'll know why when I get there." In a minute he was in the gig, the men pulling madly, for they, too, knew what it meant. Villeneuve sailing north and Nelson wandering south in search of him! To overtake Nelson; to bring him back on his quarry; to give another victory to England's idol: was it not enough to rouse every Briton of them, and put the last ounce of strength in his arms?

In five minutes the captain was back again. "South!" he said as he came aboard. "And, Roberts, this vixen must show her heels as she never did before; yes, if she kicks herself out of the water!" He dived into his cabin, and for fifteen minutes was studying the charts; then up again to change the course and trim the sails a little, even pulling at a rope in his eagerness; encouraging the men, who were as excited as he was, scanning the clouds and the sea, glancing at the compass, searching everywhere for speed, speed!

Not even when she was chasing a French ship had Tom imagined that the *Curieux* could sail so fast. At sunset they sighted St. Lucia, and in the morning St. Vincent was on the lee bow ; they had to keep well to the east to avoid the dangerous vicinity of the Grenadines, but on the morning of the 8th Ship Rock was sighted—the strange little island which rises precipitously from the sea and in thick weather has sometimes been mistaken for a ship under full sail.

Here the wind fell light and they could only make three or four miles an hour, heading now southwest and keeping a sharp lookout for Nelson's fleet ; but not a sail was sighted until late in the afternoon. Then they saw an English frigate in the south, and bore up to speak her ; Captain Bettesworth flew a string of signal flags, "news of the French fleet," to make sure of getting her attention. The frigate immediately shifted her helm to meet the corvette.

"Where's Nelson?" was the first question that Captain Bettesworth shouted through his trumpet.

"Coming north ; he went to Trinidad after Villeneuve and found he was on the wrong track. He should be in Grenada to-morrow. Where's the French fleet?"

"Passed Dominica on the 6th, going north ; I'm carrying the news to Nelson. What frigate?"

"Amphion, of Nelson's fleet. Are you certain about Villeneuve?"

"Saw him myself ; seventeen of the line, and frigates."

"You have sailed fast if you have come from Dominica since the 6th. Know where Villeneuve is going?"

"No; but Nelson will, or I lose my bet."

"Right! You are pretty sure to find his lordship at St. George's."

"I'll get there to-night."

"Your craft looks as if she could do it. What corvette is it, and who are you?"

"Curieux; Captain Bettsworth, at your orders."

"I've heard about you. Good luck! Tell his lordship that he'll pick me up hereabouts; we were scouting after Villeneuve."

"You won't find him to-day."

"So I perceive. Any news?"

"No time for gossip; the Diamond Rock capitulated after Maurice had made a glorious defense. I have a midshipman aboard who escaped from the rock; slid down a spider's web and swam across to St. Lucia."

"Is your Villeneuve yarn as straight as that?"

"Not quite; good-by."

"Good-by; my congratulations to your spider midshipman." The vessels came to their courses and passed on.

All night the corvette slid through the dark water, flashing weird phosphorescence from her bow and trailing a cloudy flame, while every little wave was crested with ghost-fires that came and went and came again out of the depths. Tom could hardly tear himself from the spectacle, and

even old sailors, who were used to phosphorescent seas, hung over the rail to watch it.

At daybreak they were off St. George's; and far away in the south appeared a dozen sails. The *Curieux* stood out to meet them, and signaled one of the leading vessels, the *Northumberland*. This was the flagship of Admiral Cochrane, commanding the West Indian squadron, and Captain Bettesworth's immediate superior, to whom he was bound to report first if possible; Nelson had found Cochrane at Barbados, with two ships, which were now with the fleet. "But if Cochrane had been in the rear, I'd have boarded Nelson as soon as I found him; no time for red tape," said Captain Bettesworth, in his bluff way. He told Tom to be ready in case the admiral wanted a first-hand account of affairs on the *Diamond*; so Tom furbished himself up, in some trepidation. He was not quite a man yet, and an admiral is a very large person indeed to a midshipman.

The *Northumberland* moved out of the line in answer to Captain Bettesworth's signal, and he pulled off to her, leaving Tom for the present. Tom stood by the rail and watched the stately ships as they came up: *Swiftsure*, *Conqueror*, *Leviathan*, *Tigre*, the great *Royal Sovereign* with her hundred guns, — names that were to be blazoned in glory a few months later. The *Northumberland* had flown a string of signal flags, and they were answered from another ship farther back in the line; Lieutenant Roberts pointed her out to Tom as the *Victory*, Lord Nelson's flagship.

In a few minutes Captain Bettesworth's gig darted back to the corvette, bringing the captain and a young officer who was introduced as Lieutenant Bligh. "Run down to the Victory, Roberts," ordered Captain Bettesworth immediately. "Mr. Reeves, you are to go on board her with me; Bligh, this is Mr. Reeves, the spunky midshipman I told you about."

Tom blushed a little as the lieutenant shook his hand and complimented him on his escape from the Diamond. "Nelson will like that," said he; "Captain Bettesworth says you set the ball rolling, and we don't know yet how big it is; you're going to see Nelson."

At this announcement Tom was considerably more scared than he had been on the cable, and the officers laughed to see his face. "Want a bracer?" asked Captain Bettesworth; "I'll send the steward for a glass of brandy."

Tom declined the brandy; "but I should like to ask a great favor, sir," he said. "Will you let Ralph Dempsey go off to the Victory with us? Not to speak to the admiral, of course; but it would be glory enough for him if he could be so near Nelson, and perhaps see him."

"Why, of course," assented the captain; "Roberts, see that Dempsey has the stroke oar."

When Ralph received the message, he was the happiest man on the corvette, and showed his sense of it by scolding the boat crew unmercifully. But they needed no tongue-lashing.

Tom looked with wonder at the towering sides

of the Victory; the little Curieux could almost have hidden her masts behind the great hull. Captain Hardy met them at the ladder, and scarcely waited for Lieutenant Bligh to introduce the visitors. "You are to go to his lordship at once," he said; "he has been eager to see you ever since the Northumberland signaled."

A minute after they were ushered into a plainly furnished cabin where a small, shabbily dressed man was pacing about like a caged animal. He had only one eye, and one sleeve hung empty, but he kept flapping it with the stump of his arm, and the fingers of his remaining hand twitched nervously. The moment they entered he sprang towards them.

"Hardy," he exclaimed, "don't tell me this is another fluke; I can't bear it!" His one eye rested on Tom, and a pleasant smile lighted the scarred face. "Who's this young gentleman?" he asked eagerly; then, without waiting for an answer, he seized Lieutenant Bligh's hand and shook it warmly. "I see you have some real news this time," he exclaimed; "out with it!"

"News of Villeneuve, my lord," said Captain Hardy; "he has gone north with his whole fleet."

Nelson stood quite still for a moment, as if communing with himself. Then he said quietly, "I suppose these gentlemen brought the news."

"Yes, my lord. This is Captain Bettesworth of the Curieux corvette; and this is Midshipman Reeves of the Diamond Rock."

"Ah, the Diamond!" exclaimed Nelson, with a smile.

"I came to vouch for Captain Bettesworth's reliability, my lord," said Lieutenant Bligh.

"No need for that if he's captain of the *Curieux*," said Nelson instantly. "You're the man who fought the *Italienne* frigate last year and knocked her all to pieces, so that she had to strike next day." He grasped Captain Bettesworth's hand, speaking so rapidly that his words tumbled one over the other. "I heard of it, and it warmed my heart, sir; that's the spirit that England needs, and has, too, wherever there's an English ship. God bless you for that fight!"

"Thank you, my lord," said Captain Bettesworth. "I brought Mr. Reeves because he knows all I have to tell and has some information at first hand."

Nelson nodded kindly to Tom. "Now tell me exactly what you know," he said, turning to Captain Bettesworth.

"The gist of it is this, my lord: Villeneuve was embarking troops at Fort-de-France on the 2d of this month; a large force, it appears. On the afternoon of the 4th, about four o'clock, he came out of the harbor with his whole fleet, or most of it, and headed north along the coast; we saw the ships and counted them. They moved slowly, wind being foul and light inshore, I suppose; but on the 6th they were off Dominica; that is, we saw the advance of the fleet off the southern end of the island late on the 5th, and the rear at day-

light on the 6th, and they were still heading north."

"Windward or leeward side of the island?" asked Nelson quickly.

"Leeward, my lord; and they kept well in-shore."

Nelson paced to and fro restlessly, with the empty sleeve flapping. "Hardy," he said suddenly, "run past Grenada, windward or leeward side, whichever is quickest; signal the fleet to do the same; speak the corvette to keep by us." He continued pacing while Captain Hardy went to give the necessary orders. Then he stopped, looking absently through the port, and noticed the *Curieux*; his face lighted with interest. "That's a smart little craft of yours, captain," he remarked; "looks as if she had heels."

"She's a beauty, my lord!" said Captain Bettesworth proudly; "there's nothing in the West Indies that can beat her."

Lord Nelson nodded and looked again. The corvette was coming about gracefully to follow the flagship, and Nelson watched her. "Where were you when you saw the French fleet?" he asked.

"About twelve miles off the entrance of Fort-de-France Harbor, my lord. We were watching for it, and the corvette was under bare poles so that the French should n't notice her."

"The French ships were counted?"

"Yes, my lord; from the masthead. There were seventeen sail of the line, and another that we

could n't be certain of — perhaps it was a large store-ship ; and seven frigates, and two brigs. I think that Villeneuve left one or two vessels at Fort-de-France ; Captain Maurice counted the fleet from the Diamond as it arrived, and my count does n't quite tally with his."

Lord Nelson had been looking quietly out of the port. Wheeling swiftly, he fixed his one eye on Captain Bettesworth and fired a question like a pistol-shot :

"Did you count those ships yourself, or did a lieutenant do it for you?"

Captain Bettesworth turned very red. "My lord," he said, "I'm an old salt, and — well, I know it is n't customary for commanders to go aloft, but I like to see things for myself. I went to the mast-head and counted the vessels, and I'm sure the count was right."

"If you had n't, sir, I'd have had you court-martialed," said Nelson grimly. Then he went on pacing and flapping his coat-sleeve. Suddenly he stopped and faced about. "I ought to be court-martialed myself," he exclaimed. "I let myself be taken in by a cock-and-bull story that Villeneuve had gone south, and I have lost five days. Too bad ! too bad ! Bligh, I could n't sleep last night, thinking what England may suffer if I don't win this race. But I shall win ; I feel it ; I know it ! I was sick when I left Europe ; the doctors had ordered me home. But as long as there's a breath of life in this battered carcass, I'll give it to my King and my country !" He went on in

this strain for five minutes, and it made Tom vaguely sorry and ashamed. Like many nervous men, Nelson had the defect of talking extravagantly about himself; it came from the very intensity of his character. Those who knew him best forgot the rhapsodies in their admiration.

Suddenly he stopped short and laid his hand on Tom's shoulder. "What news of His Majesty's sloop Diamond Rock?" he asked.

"I'm sorry to say, sir, — my lord, I mean," — Tom stopped, confused, but Lord Nelson only laughed. "The — Captain Maurice had to capitulate; that is, he had resolved to capitulate when I left."

"Not without a fight, I hope!" exclaimed Nelson.

"After the pluckiest fight I ever saw," put in Captain Bettesworth. "It was magnificent, my lord! Maurice had only a sloop's crew, and a short one at that, but he held out for three days against a small navy and two or three regiments of soldiers; and he only gave in when the water was exhausted and his men were perishing of thirst. I tried to throw in a supply, but the sloop I sent was run down and nabbed, and after that all I could do was to lie off like a booby while those fellows made heroes of themselves. By Jove, if you'd seen it, my lord, you'd have said it was a fight! Just the tip of that rock sticking out of the smoke, with the English flag on it," — Captain Bettesworth dashed his hand across his eyes and half choked a sob, — "and the ships running in,

and then running out again as if they did n't like it" —

"Go on!" cried Nelson, with his one eye gleaming.

"Then the French managed to effect a landing, after a hundred or so had been killed, — Mr. Reeves here rolled down a barrel of stones and smashed one of their boats, — and they had the base of the rock. How many did you say there were, Mr. Reeves?"

"We thought over a thousand," said Tom; "Captain Maurice estimated twelve hundred."

"Go on! go on!" cried Nelson.

"And Maurice had only a hundred and nine, all told. But he held the rock above until they had n't a drop of water, and hardly any ammunition, and there was nothing to do but accept the best terms he could get. Well, my lord, Maurice sent a lieutenant with a flag of truce, and he was offered honorable terms — officers and men paroled, and march to the landing with drums and colors; but Maurice was n't quite beaten yet" —

"Such men are never beaten," said Nelson.

"It seems the lieutenant was talking with some French officers, and they let it out that Villeneuve was embarking troops at Fort-de-France" —

"I see," said Nelson quickly.

"My lord, when Maurice learned that, he guessed at once that some rascality was plotting; he forgot his own troubles, which were big enough, God knows, and thought only of getting the news

to me so I could use it; he knew I was near with the corvette."

"Captain Maurice is your friend, is n't he?" asked Nelson.

"I'm proud to say that he is, my lord; worse luck that I could n't help him!"

"He's my friend, too, from this day!" said Nelson emphatically. "Go on! These are the things I love to hear about."

"He sent Mr. Reeves to me, my lord."

"But you said that the French had the base of the rock; how did Mr. Reeves pass them?"

"Your lordship will have heard how Commodore Hood fortified the Diamond Rock?"

"Hauling his guns up a cable, you mean? It was a capital idea, and like Hood."

"Well, my lord, the cable had been left there, or, at any rate, there was a cable when the French attacked the Diamond; they let that side of the rock alone, because it's a sheer precipice, six hundred feet high. There was a yawl at the foot of the cable, and Mr. Reeves slid down to it, with one seaman" —

"Slid down six hundred feet?" cried Nelson.

"More than that, my lord, because the cable slants; and so he got off to me with the message, picking up some more information as he passed the French vessels in the night; and that set me to watching for Villeneuve, and that's why I'm here, my lord. It all came from Maurice's thoughtfulness and this young gentleman's pluck in coming down that cable; I'm not ashamed

to say that I should n't have dared do it myself."

"Yes, you would," said Nelson quickly; "an Englishman will do anything for England. You're a brave man, Captain Bettesworth, and I like you better because you stick up for your friends. And you, Mr. Reeves, did your duty; no one can do more than that. England has nothing to fear when even her boys are heroes."

Tom was blushing rosy under the great man's praise; he felt as if he could die for Nelson. Captain Hardy had come into the cabin again, and he, too, had a word of commendation for Tom, who grew more confused every moment. Nelson was looking out of the port again.

"Captain Bettesworth," he asked suddenly, "when can your corvette be ready to sail for England?"

"She's ready now, my lord," said the captain wonderingly.

"To carry important dispatches; to sail swiftly" —

"Yes, my lord."

Nelson looked out of the port again. "It will be better for you to take the northern route."

"Yes, my lord, if you wish it; probably I could get there a little sooner if I took the western route."

"I know; but for a particular reason I wish you to go north; and keep lookouts on the masts as soon as you pass Guadeloupe."

"To look out for what, my lord?" Captain

Hardy and Lieutenant Bligh were listening with interest.

Nelson was silent for a moment. "I may be mistaken," he said; "man's judgment is fallible. But I think you are likely to sight Villeneuve's fleet somewhere in the Atlantic. And if you do, I want you to report it to the Admiralty."

"Villeneuve!" exclaimed Captain Hardy.

"I believe he is on his way to Europe. It is my duty to go to Dominica, and as much farther among the islands as I can trace him; but it will be a vain chase. And before many days,—mark my words!—I must cross the Atlantic after him. The rascal has eighteen ships of the line, and I rather think twenty, for there were two at Guadeloupe which he will have picked up. I shall have only eleven of the line and two frigates, for I must leave one ship with Cochrane. Nevertheless, it may be necessary to risk a battle; aye, to lose this fleet, if by doing it we can prevent a worse disaster. As an Englishman I should prefer a battle at any odds; but as an admiral I must avoid one if my duty will let me. My best hope is to reach Europe before Villeneuve does. And you," he added, whirling to Captain Bettesworth, "must get to Europe as many days ahead of us as you can. Do you know why?"

"To carry your dispatches, my lord; and to report Villeneuve's fleet if I see it."

"To do more, sir; to save England!"

XXXVII

NAPOLEON'S PLAN

LORD NELSON spoke with the sudden insight which sometimes comes to great men. He did not explain his words, and of all who were present, perhaps only Captain Hardy understood what he meant. But it is true that the Diamond Rock, and the message which Tom carried down the cable, and the Curieux, were linked to great events. We must read back a little in history.

The Emperor Napoleon was preparing to invade England. He had collected at Boulogne, on the narrowest part of the Channel, an army of one hundred and fifty thousand men, the finest soldiers, perhaps, that the world ever saw. He had infantry, cavalry, artillery, stores, everything. He had created a vast flotilla of small vessels to carry the host. He had trained his army to embark and disembark with marvelous celerity. Never, since the Spanish Armada, had England been so threatened. But England shows her strength when the need is sorest.

She had soldiers, good and brave ones, though not so many as Napoleon's. She had the untrained courage and stubbornness of a whole nation which is given to grumbling in ordinary

times, but always forgets to grumble when there is work or fighting to do. Better than these, she had the finest navy in the world, with the tradition of a line of naval heroes which has never been equaled, not even by the United States. Above all, she had a little, nervous, sickly man who was as great in his way as Napoleon himself; who did some foolish things when he was idle, but did the right thing every time when his country needed him. The son of a country clergyman, he had entered the navy at an age when most boys are struggling with the multiplication table; had climbed from one grade to another, and to the peerage, by sheer gallantry and worth; had lost an eye in one battle and an arm in another. A man who had more fight in his small body than a hundred bigger men could hold: "No captain," he said, "can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an enemy." The idol of every English heart, the hero of song and story, the strong shield of England's greatness. And that man was Horatio Nelson.

He had been Napoleon's evil genius. At Aboukir he had annihilated a French fleet and prevented Napoleon's conquest of the East. He had kept other French fleets blockaded. At Copenhagen, where he was fighting Napoleon's allies, his superior officer had signaled him to retire from the combat; Nelson clapped his telescope to his blind eye: "I can't see the signal," said he; "keep mine for 'closer action' flying!" And he won the battle.

Napoleon had collected two strong fleets, one at Toulon, on the Mediterranean, and the other at Brest, on the Atlantic side of France ; there were smaller fleets, and the Spanish navy was ready to help him. The French flotilla and army could not pass the English Channel as long as it was guarded by English ships. Napoleon's object was to unite all his own fleets in the Channel, and at the same time to get the English away from it ; if, for a few days, there were only French ships there, the French army could cross ; and from the Channel to London was only a few days' march. Napoleon might have failed anyway ; I think he would have failed, for he never understood the stubborn English spirit, which is strongest when it seems broken. But—he might have succeeded. And if he had, it would have altered the fate, not only of England, but of Europe and the world.

To get the English ships away from the Channel, Napoleon's plan was to get his own fleets away secretly, so that some, at least, of the English would go in search of them. The English possessions were to be harried, and more ships would hasten to their aid. Then, when the Channel was nearly clear, the French fleets were to return to it suddenly, sweep the few remaining English out of the way, and guard Napoleon's army across to Kent. It was a magnificent scheme ; such a scheme as Napoleon loved. Of course, he kept it in his own mind ; England only knew of the threatening army and flotilla, evidently intended for an invasion ; but she trusted to her fleets and to Nelson.

Yet for a time the scheme prospered. Nelson was in the Mediterranean, but during some thick weather Admiral Villeneuve managed to slip out of Toulon and evade him. Nelson did not know where he had gone ; you must remember that he had guessed nothing of Napoleon's great scheme, and in those days there were no steamers crossing every day, nor telegraphs flashing news from port to port. Nelson was deceived into supposing that Villeneuve had gone eastward, and he sailed clear to Egypt in search of him. Then he struggled back against head winds, only to find that the French fleet, with some Spanish ships which had joined it, had passed the strait of Gibraltar three weeks ahead of him. Shortly after he learned that Villeneuve had sailed for the West Indies, and without an hour's delay he made sail in chase. That was to be a chase across the Atlantic and back again.

Admiral Villeneuve's orders were to go first to Martinique, and then to make short expeditions against the British islands — St. Vincent, Grenada, Antigua, Barbados, any that he could get at ; there were plenty of French troops in Martinique and Guadeloupe to aid him as a land force. And the object of all this harrying was to be, not so much conquest, as noise ; Napoleon believed that the English would hear it at the right moment, and would send their fleets to protect the West Indian colonies ; then Villeneuve was to slip around northward, reach the Atlantic shores of France, effect a junction with the Brest fleet if it

had not gone to meet him, and the Channel would be in Napoleon's power. But he had not counted enough on Nelson ; and he had not counted at all on Captain Maurice and the *Curieux*.

Villeneuve reached Martinique safely, as we have seen, but he had taken no English islands except the Diamond Rock. Now compare the dates. On the 4th of June the French fleet left Fort-de-France for the north, and on the same day, the 4th of June, Nelson reached Barbados. Deceived by the false reports that Villeneuve had gone southward, Nelson sailed to Trinidad. Returning on his tracks, he was near Grenada on the 9th ; there he encountered the *Curieux* and learned from Captain Bettesworth that Villeneuve was really moving northward, several days ahead of him. For the first time, Nelson got an inkling of Napoleon's scheme ; he believed that Villeneuve was returning to Europe to guard the French army across the Channel. In point of fact, it is doubtful if Villeneuve left Fort-de-France with the intention of going at once to Europe. But shortly after, he learned that Nelson had reached Barbados and might soon be at his heels. Probably he supposed Nelson's fleet to be larger than it really was ; at any rate, he started for Europe without attempting to attack the English islands, and without waiting even to disembark the troops he had taken on board. Nelson followed northward as far as Antigua ; having there made certain that Villeneuve had gone to Europe, he left Antigua on the 13th, straining every sail to get across the Atlantic before the French fleet.

But this is going ahead of our story ; on the morning of the 9th, Captain Bettesworth and Tom were with Lord Nelson on the Victory, in sight of Grenada. Nelson had still to prepare his dispatches, and he dismissed the visitors after inviting them to breakfast with him. So, an hour later, Tom sat down to eat with the great admiral, who seemed to have thrown all care aside, and to be intent only on making his guests enjoy themselves. Yet he was eager for information ; he made Tom relate the arrival of the French and Spanish fleet and describe it, vessel by vessel, as well as he could, comparing Captain Bettesworth's account. Sometimes he recognized vessels by the description and named them : Bucentaure, San Rafael, and so on. Then Tom had to tell all about the fight on the Diamond, and about his descent of the cable with Ralph. "I wish I could see this gunner of yours," said Nelson ; "he seems to be a fine fellow."

"He came across in the boat with us," said Captain Bettesworth. "Dempsey is like all the rest of 'em, my lord ; he was eager to get a glimpse of you."

"Is that so ?" laughed the admiral ; "we'll have him in here ;" and he dispatched a marine for Ralph, who presently came in, bowing and scraping ; he was struggling between elation and bashfulness, and all in a perspiration. But Nelson understood sailors.

"Ah, my man !" he said, "Mr. Reeves has been telling me how you brought that message

from the Diamond. It was an important message, and I'm much obliged to you."

"I did n't do nothen, yer honor," said Ralph, very red, and holding his hat tight against his breast. "Mr. Reeves, he brung the message. I ain't nothen but a able seaman as obeys horders, yer honor."

"And that's a good enough thing to be and to do," said Nelson heartily; "there's nothing in God's world better than an English seaman. We all of us obey orders. I order you to fire a gun, and you fire it, and there's a hole in the ship we're fighting; it took both of us to make that hole, did n't it? Now, I want you to drink my health before you leave the old Victory;" and he poured out a glass of wine, which Ralph took with a trembling hand.

"I drinks to—to the best man in England, or out of it either, an' I don't make no exception of the angil Gab'ril, w'erever he is,—and the had-miral as we'd all die for an' be 'appy a-doin' of it if it ud help 'im to thrash them Frenchers, blast 'em!" and Ralph swallowed the wine and put the glass in his pocket and walked out with the tears streaming down his honest face; he had forgotten even to touch his forelock when he left. Nelson sprang up and whispered to the marine to run after him with a message: "He's to keep the glass as a present from Nelson."

An hour later Captain Bettesworth and Tom were on the Curieux, and she was heading for the open Atlantic with every sail set.

XXXVIII

DISPATCHES FROM NELSON

How they sailed ! It was a foul wind, but they made one hundred and seventy miles in the first twenty-four hours ; every officer and every man was striving to get the utmost possible speed out of the little craft. Captain Bettesworth had mustered all hands on deck and made a speech to them : “ My lads,” he said, “ we are going to old England, and we want to do such sailing as we never did before ; it’s of the utmost importance to Nelson and to England that we should get to Plymouth soon ; the sooner the better. It’s so important that I promise, in Lord Nelson’s name, two weeks’ extra pay to every man and boy on this corvette if we do the voyage inside of a month.”

The men cheered a little, and then consulted in low tones. Finally Ralph was pushed forward ; he had become their acknowledged spokesman.

“ Axin’ yer honor’s parding,” said Ralph, “ me an’ my mates we wants you to know as how we ain’t a-doin’ this ’ere job for no hextry pay. A’ter we done it, if the hadmiral wants to give us a bit of a soovynoor, well an’ good, an’ we ain’t makin’ no objections to it. But wot we means to say is, that ain’t wot we ’re a-doin’ of it for, so don’t

you make no mistake. If they's a man here as would n't do his purtiest for Nelson, jest let 'im step forard an' we'll drop 'im overboard nice an' easy an' go on our ways rejicin'. Hadmiral Nelson, he says as how he wants to see wot this 'ere hooker can do in the way of sailin'. Well, then, she does all she knows how, don't she? An' we sailor-men, we does all we knows how; so that's fair an' above board. All you got to do is to give your horders, an' cuss us a bit w'en we needs it, an' we an' the corvette we does the rest; if the darlin' don't show her heels, you may call me a marine. Mates, three cheers for Nelson, God bless 'im!" And there was such a roar as even a coming battle could not have drawn from those British throats.

So, while Villeneuve and Nelson were racing to Europe, the little Curieux was racing to outstrip them both: to forewarn England and frustrate Napoleon and give Nelson the victory. The history of the world depended on speed.

How the sea boiled in their wake, and how the yards strained and tore at their braces, and how the weed slipped by in the dark water, and how the dear little craft shook herself and laughed after every plunge; and how the men sprang to their work with hearty yo-heave-yos and jokes and cheers, as if it were all a frolic. They cheered for Nelson, talked of him, sang of him; Nelson, Nelson! To race for Nelson, to haul and climb and strain every muscle for Nelson, to save England and give more glory to England's hero. Even

Captain Bettesworth and Tom spoke of it rather as a voyage for Nelson than for England ; but Nelson meant England to them. The captain and Lieutenant Roberts studied the sea and the sky and the chart, and watched for every slant of wind to get a foot more of speed ; and they congratulated each other when the run was a good one, and told the men of it, and the men always cheered for Nelson. The very cook in his galley had somehow got the idea that he was boiling and baking for Nelson, and he boiled and baked with unwonted zeal, and a grin on his sour face.

The northeast trade was almost dead against their true course ; all they could do was to get as near to it as might be, sometimes tacking for a better slant. Lookouts were kept on the masts day and night, but for a week nothing was seen except an English frigate which tried to intercept them ; Captain Bettesworth signaled that he was carrying dispatches for Nelson, and the frigate dipped her flag in salute as they raced by. Then, on the tenth day, when they had made over fifteen hundred miles, and were east of Bermuda, a number of vessels were sighted in the west ; they were heading about as the *Curieux* was, that is, northwest, on a long tack, and Captain Bettesworth altered his course a little, drawing nearer to the strangers without losing much in doing so. The captain went to the masthead and studied them through his telescope long and carefully ; as the corvette drew nearer, more and more vessels came into view, until the whole western horizon was covered

with them. Captain Bettsworth came down with wonder and rejoicing on his face ; he had been a little skeptical when Lord Nelson told him that he might encounter the French fleet.

"I give in !" he exclaimed ; " it 's Villeneuve, sure as fate. After this I 'll take Nelson's word for anything ; he sees a thundering sight farther than the rest of us. Well, we can carry straight news to England now ! "

A group of sailors, with Ralph at their head, came along the deck ; they stood awkwardly, as sailors will, while Ralph touched his forelock. The captain nodded.

" Beggin' yer honor's parding," said Ralph, " me an' t' others ud like to ax a question ; not as you 'll need for to answer it if 't ain't agreeable so to do."

"What is it?" asked the captain good-naturedly.

"Nothen much ; on'y we 're wishful to know if them there wessels ain't the ones as we seed down Martinico way."

"You 've guessed it right," said the captain, laughing ; " they 're the very same ones."

"Well, yer honor, we 're thinkin' that mebbe the hadmiral wanted this 'ere wixin to race 'em, jest to show the Frenchers as they ain't none o' their ships wuth a brass farden."

"Right again ; Nelson wanted us to get to Europe ahead of 'em ; as many days ahead as we could."

"And a verry decent haspiration it was for the

hadmiral, an' does 'im honor. Now mebbe ye won't mind tellin' us 'bout how many days' start the Frenchers had."

"Six or seven, as near as we can tell."

"Well, then, wot you jawin' 'bout? We're a-sailin' two knots to the Frencher's one, ain't we? And we're a-goin' to do better, ain't we? Them there scaramouches ain't got no chanct long o' this 'ere dancin' gal no more 'n if they was hanchored. It's Nelson's race, an' I calls for three cheers for the winner" — The rest was lost in a roar of applause.

A frigate was detached from the fleet in chase of the corvette, but she might as well have chased a sea-gull; in an hour's time she was clean out of sight, with all her companions. And now the corvette ran into favorable winds and slid through it faster and faster; the officers laughed and slapped each other on the back when the day's run was announced at noon, and even those who knew the little craft best marveled at the figures; Tom could hardly believe them. They had a two days' gale, but it was in the right direction; Captain Bettsworth would not spare his vessel, and kept every sail set; one was torn to ribbons, but they had another up in a few minutes, and sped on; it seemed as if the very masts would be blown out of her. The corvette took it all bravely, and when Captain Bettsworth worked out the run, there was a satisfied smile on his face. "Two hundred and ninety-six, Roberts," said he; "how's that, eh?" It was a record-breaker for those times, but

they bettered it next day with three hundred and one miles. Hurrah for Nelson and England ! Day after day under the glorious blue sky, with blue billows chasing them and the coppers gleaming in the dizzy swirl ; every sail musical, and every heart beating high with excitement as they neared the English coast.

There were vessels lying off Plymouth Sound, but signal flags were run up, "Dispatches from Nelson," and the guard ships were crowded with cheering sailors as the corvette whirled past. Nelson ! On in the daylight and darkness, past the harbor lights ; no red tape of visiting officers to delay Nelson's dispatches ; cheers and Godspeeds and a clear road for Nelson, the people's idol !

"Mr. Reeves," said Captain Bettesworth, as they were entering the harbor, "I'm going to post up to London as fast as horses will carry me ; and I want you to go along. Take only a light bag ; I'll see you supplied when we get there."

It was two o'clock in the morning of July 7th when the anchor was dropped, and almost before it had touched the water the captain and Tom were in a boat, pulling for the shore as rapidly as strong arms could propel them. There was a guard-house on the wharf, with a sentinel, and a sleepy lieutenant sitting on a bench. "I must start for London at once," said Captain Bettesworth.

"Well," drawled the lieutenant, "I shan't stop you."

"I carry urgent dispatches from Lord Nelson."

"What!" yelled the lieutenant, springing to his feet. "Come along to the post-house; I'll stir 'em up. Nelson!" and they tore through the street, with Ralph carrying their small luggage, for he had begged to see them off.

"Where's the postmaster?" cried the lieutenant as they passed in at a door; a hostler pointed over his shoulder, and they dashed into a room where a man was sleeping; the sleeper growled as the lieutenant shook him.

"Get out your best horses and boys this minute! These gentlemen are going to London."

The man rubbed his eyes.

"Look here, my good fellow," said Captain Bettesworth, "I have two reasons for you to hurry; here's one" — and he slipped a sovereign into the postmaster's hand; "and the other is that I'm carrying dispatches of the utmost importance from Nelson" —

"Sovring not needed!" cried the man. "Here, you, Dick, Harry, get the bays out in ten seconds or I'll flay ye alive; they're going for Nelson" —

"And they'll go!" exclaimed Harry. In a marvelously short time the carriage was out, and Ralph was waving his hat, and the captain and Tom were off through the darkness; horses galloping, wheels thundering, post-boys shouting, — a wild race for Nelson and England.

Away through the night and over the hills and downs, with clatter and whir and crack of whip; the first posting-house was reached, and the cap-

tain flung a sovereign each to the boys, and they roused the post with their cry: "Gen'lemen for London with dispatches from Nelson!" and the relay tore out of the stable, and they were off again in a minute, the boys shouting "Nelson!" as they sped on. It was Nelson's name always that overcame obstacles and shortened delays and swung whips and whirled them faster and faster toward London. Dawn came soon, and day; they snatched part of a hasty breakfast at one posting-house, carrying the rest in their hands, not to lose a moment; the captain flung down a sovereign in payment and would not wait for the change. On, with the boys urging their horses; market-carts turned hastily off the road; men waved their hats; a galloping post-carriage in front made way for them when they shouted "Dispatches from Nelson;" they nearly ran over a cripple, but he laughed and cheered when they cried "Nelson!" Dinner was what they could get in five minutes; supper was bread and cheese and a draught of ale; and the captain paid for everything in sovereigns.

Night came again. "Nelson!" yelled the boys as they flew on in the darkness; they and their passengers were splashed with mud. "Nelson!" and they were nearing London; "Nelson! Nelson!" by lighted mansions and flashes of music and dancing; "Nelson!" through the dark lanes and down the streets; "Nelson!" past sentinels and through an archway, up to Lord Barham's door.

"Sorry, sir," said the footman; "'is lordshup 'as retired to 'is happartments. No, sir; I'll take the sovring, and thank you, sir, but I can't wentur' to hawaken 'is lordshup. 'Is lordshup's horders is positive, sir."

"See here, my man," fumed Captain Bettesworth, "I have urgent dispatches from Lord Nelson; there is not a moment to lose! Can't you call his lordship's secretary?"

"Secretary's gone hout, sir. You'll 'ave to come in the morning, sir. Hexcellent 'otels in London, sir, and some of 'em keeps hopen all night;" and the door was shut. They had raced from the West Indies to be stopped by a flunkey!

No wonder that the captain swore! But there was no help for it. With the aid of their post-boys they found an inn, secured a room and went to bed, leaving orders to be called at six next morning.

By seven they were at Lord Barham's house again. The flunkey was standing outside the door, looking very much scared.

"Please walk right in, sir. The secretary come 'ome, sir, and I told 'm wot you said, sir, and he waked 'is lordshup, sir, and 'is lordshup's awake yet, sir, and 'e's been a-swearing most horful, sir. And oh! for Gawd's sake, sir, please say something to 'is lordshup, or I'll lose my place, sir! for Gawd's sake, sir!"

Captain Bettesworth went up first, and was closeted with Lord Barham for over an hour. Tom, meanwhile, was shown into a handsome

room, and presently the flunkey came to tell him that his breakfast was ready. "I 'ad it cooked hexpress, sir, and if there 's hanything more you 'd like, let me know, sir, and I 'll order it immejit. I 'm most deeply sorry, sir, for the hoccurrence of last night. This way to the breakfast-room, sir." The breakfast was excellent, and Tom was hungry enough to enjoy it, for they had left the inn with only a cup of coffee. The flunkey waited on him as if he had been a prince royal at least.

Shortly after breakfast he was summoned to Lord Barham's room. The First Lord of the Admiralty was pacing the floor, half dressed, and his secretary was hastily writing out dispatches which had just been dictated ; Captain Bettesworth was standing near, his face radiant.

"Good-morning, Mr. Reeves," said his lordship, grasping Tom's hand ; "I hope that confounded footman gave you something to eat. The fool made us waste six good hours ; but we 'll beat 'em yet ! Are those dispatches ready ?"

"Almost, my lord," answered the secretary, scratching rapidly.

"Mr. Reeves, I want to thank you in the name of the King and England ; it was a grand thing, your coming down that cable, and it will have grand results ; the game is in our hands now, and we shall play to win. Tell me all about it, from the time you left the Diamond Rock ; I know how it was lost ; most honorably, sir ; and by the Lord Harry, it's a victory for the French that will cost them more than fifty defeats ! If the Diamond

had n't been lost, Captain Maurice would not have heard of the embarkation of the French troops ; and it was that news which put Captain Bettesworth on the watch, and helped Nelson to unravel the plot. England will not forget it, I promise you that ! ”

So Tom had to tell his story over again. Lord Barham clapped him on the back. “ Mr. Reeves,” he said, “ how long have you been in the navy ? ”

“ A little over two years, my lord,” answered Tom. “ I embarked as a midshipman in June, 1803.”

“ Have you your rating as passed midshipman ? ”

“ Not yet, my lord ; Captain Maurice was going to apply for it in May, but then the French fleet came, and he could not send a letter.”

“ Maurice told me that,” put in Captain Bettesworth.

“ Very well ; you are passed midshipman now ; I will see that the papers are made out at once.”

The tears came to Tom's eyes ; tears of joy and pride and love for England. He began to stammer thanks, but the secretary came up with the papers, and Lord Barham signed them quickly. “ Hand them to the couriers at once,” he ordered ; “ wait ! have two couriers ride with each dispatch ; then if an accident happens to one, the other can take it. Tell them they must fly ! fly ! If they kill their horses, that 's a small matter compared with the dispatches.” Then he turned to Tom again. “ There is another matter,” he said ; “ Lord Nelson

has sent me a private letter in which he recommends that you be made a lieutenant at once ; evidently Nelson took a fancy to you."

"Oh, sir, please, no!" cried Tom, all in a tremble. "I don't want — that is, I'm too young to be a lieutenant yet ; and I have n't earned it, sir,— my lord."

Lord Barham laid his hand kindly on Tom's shoulder. "You've earned it well enough ; but I think you're right ; England wants training and experience as well as worth. Lord Nelson is so eager that he expects to accomplish everything in a moment ; his thoughts fly ahead of the days and years. But England is not ungrateful, either ; Captain Bettsworth is post-captain, and Maurice will be, as soon as we learn the result of the court-martial ; I have no doubt that it will be favorable. As for you, Mr. Reeves, Captain Bettsworth gives an excellent account of you, and" — Lord Barham reflected for a moment, and then sat down to a table and wrote a few lines. "Read that," he said, handing the paper to Tom. Tom read :

Midshipman Thomas Reeves, by his courage and devotion to duty on the Diamond Rock sloop, did England an effectual service and aided to thwart the machinations of Napoleon. Admiral Lord Nelson, having this service in view, has recommended Mr. Reeves for a lieutenantancy ; but in accordance with Mr. Reeves's wishes, this deserved promotion has been postponed for one year. At the end of that time, if I am still at the head of

the Admiralty, I promise to give Mr. Reeves his lieutenant's commission ; if I have a successor before then, I beg that he will fulfill this promise.

(Signed)

BARHAM.

LONDON, July 9, 1805.

"And I hope to see you an admiral," said his lordship, smiling.

"I — I thank you, sir ; but truly, sir, I don't deserve it ; I only carried a message, and any midshipman could do that."

"Perhaps ; but if every officer did his duty as well, we should have less trouble in the service. Now, Mr. Reeves, what more can I do for you ?"

"Oh, thank you, sir, — my lord, I mean ; I should like very much to see my mother and father ; it's two years since I left home."

"By all means ; Danford, is n't it ? Do you need any money ?"

"No, my lord ; Captain Bettesworth has arranged that."

"Good-by, then ; you have two months' leave. I wish you a pleasant journey. Come to me at the end of a year if you are in London ; if not, let me know where you are. Good-by, captain," and Lord Barham bowed them out of the door.

Captain Bettesworth grasped the midshipman's hand as soon as they were outside. "Tom, my boy," — the captain had taken to calling him Tom, — "I congratulate you ; it is an unprecedented honor and a tremendous shove for you ; why, I was passed midshipman for five years before I got

my grade. You deserve it, though. Let me see the paper." Tom drew the precious document from an inner pocket, and the captain gloated over it. "Hope you'll sail with me if Maurice does n't get you," he said. "I'm glad you did n't take the commission now; this paper will be worth more to you in the long run, and as it is, you'll be one of the youngest lieutenants in the navy. Now come along to a tailor; you'll be wanting a new jacket to go home in, and I know a fellow who will do it in time if I ask him; I breakfasted in Lord Barham's rooms." Tom, who was still in the borrowed plumage of Midshipman Dilling, was very glad of the suggestion.

So, next morning, Tom rolled away from London in another post-carriage; but there was no hurrying now, no galloping of horses, and post-boys with their cries of "Nelson! Nelson!" Quite at his ease he made the journey, stopping to dine and sleep luxuriously; and on the third day he was folded in his mother's arms.

What a sensation there was over Lord Barham's paper, to be sure!

XXXIX

THE END OF THE STORY

THE story of the Diamond Rock is told. In consequence of Lord Nelson's dispatches and the certain news of Villeneuve's return, the Channel fleet was strengthened; the French fleet at Brest moved out a little about the time when Villeneuve was expected, but the British ships encountered it with a hot fire, and the French were obliged to keep under the shelter of their land batteries. Sir Robert Calder, cruising off Cape Finisterre, was reinforced on the 19th of July and warned to look out for Villeneuve. The French fleet was sighted by him on the 22d, and a hot battle ensued, in which the English took two of the enemy's ships. Villeneuve might have pushed on, for the English fleet was much weaker than his own; but he saw that his master's plans had failed, and he turned back, discouraged, along the Spanish and Portuguese coasts, going from one port to another and picking up some reinforcements; he finally took refuge in Cadiz. But Villeneuve had been outraced, for already, on the 19th, Lord Nelson's fleet had reached Gibraltar. Napoleon saw that his scheme was broken; he had an hour of awful passion, and then threw himself into another great plan; the army

of invasion was whirled away across France to fight the battle of Austerlitz, and England was saved.

Nelson returned to England, but soon went back to take command of the fleet which was blockading Cadiz. After a while Villeneuve came out with the French and Spanish fleet; and on October 21st Nelson almost annihilated it at the great battle of Trafalgar. It was a dearly bought victory, for Nelson himself was killed; but it put an end forever to Napoleon's idea of invading England; thereafter, with a terribly weakened navy, he was forced to confine his conquests to the Continent.

Captain Maurice and his men reached Barbados as prisoners; in an hour they were heroes. The laws of the navy required that any commander who gave up his vessel to the enemy should be tried by court-martial. Here is an extract from the finding of the court which investigated the loss of the Diamond Rock:

"The Court is of the opinion that Captain J. W. Maurice, the officers and company of His Majesty's late sloop Diamond Rock, did everything in their power to the very last in defense of the rock, and against a superior force. And the Court cannot dismiss Captain Maurice without expressing their admiration of his conduct; and also they express the highest approbation of the support given by the officers and men under his command."

A few weeks later, with the news brought by

the Curieux, all England was ringing with the story : how a sloop's crew had defended itself for days against ten times the number of men, backed by a whole squadron ; how they had killed or disabled almost as many as their own force counted before their ammunition and water gave out and they were forced to surrender. That was the public part of the news, but at the Admiralty they knew more : Tom's exploit on the cable was not for the newspapers.

The French could do nothing with the Diamond, so they abandoned it after destroying the works and stores and rolling the cannon over into the sea. A single tricolored flag was left on the summit, but after a while the wind blew it away.

As for Tom's subsequent exploits, — he rose to be a post-captain before he retired from the navy, — I have no more to tell at present. But there is one incident which I must relate, because it seems to have a connection with this story.

It was during the "Hundred Days," in 1815 ; Napoleon had returned from Elba, and England, after a short peace, was again plunged into war with France. Many French merchant vessels were out, never dreaming of harm ; and of these the English made an easy prey. Tom, at the time, was on a man-of-war which was cruising off the Azores ; but he had just received his captain's commission and was looking for a chance to go to England, where he was to take the command of a frigate ; at present he was practically a passenger. He was greatly liked by officers and men,

who spoke of him as a "rising man;" at any rate, he was a brave and courteous one. People wondered why he had not married; the ladies, indeed, liked him, and he was polite to them in a stately way; but he declared that he would remain a bachelor until the war was over. "I'm only twenty-six," he would say, laughing; "time enough for a naval man to talk of wedlock when he's thirty."

One day a French merchantman was sighted; the English ship gave chase and speedily overhauled her, and of course the French captain did not attempt to resist. The vessel turned out to be the *Baleine*, from Martinique for France, with a cargo of sugar and several passengers. As she had to be taken to Plymouth, Tom offered to go in command of the prize crew, thus doing a service while reaching his destination. His offer was gladly accepted, and he went on board at once. After giving a few necessary orders on deck, he hastened below to assure the passengers that they would be treated with courtesy and released as soon as they reached England if they could show that they were not in government service.

One of the passengers was a priest, and Captain Reeves quickly made things right with him; he said there were only two others, a Martinique sugar-planter and his daughter. But when these two appeared, Tom almost jumped out of his boots; for the planter was M. de la Bourdonier, and the young lady, as Tom instantly guessed, was no other than Mademoiselle. She had grown somewhat taller, and about ten thousand times

prettier, he thought ; and she was very sedate, as a young French lady should be ; and behind her sedateness she had laughing eyes, which may be French or English or American, but are always the most beautiful things on God's earth ; at least, Tom thought so. M. de la Bourdonier did not know Tom at first ; when he did, his greetings were as warm as possible. Mademoiselle looked on demurely and said never a word ; she had recognized her old acquaintance in an instant.

After that, of course, Tom could n't do enough for his passengers ; and at the end of twenty-four hours the situation was changed, thus : Tom still commanded the ship, but Mademoiselle commanded the commander ; in other words, Captain Reeves had fallen over head and ears in love with Mademoiselle, and the young lady was perfectly well aware of it, though the captain had n't said a word. From that day he was the most wretched slave in the British Navy. Mademoiselle made him wait on her assiduously, fetch and carry and do this and do that, constantly changing her whims and forcing him to undo what he had done, and then do it all over again, until his life was a burden to him. And all with the sweetest possible air of being helplessly in his power : why, she would ask permission to come on deck, though the deck and the whole vessel and everything in it were at her orders ! Worst of all, she would not let him say a word of love or marriage ; he tried to, fifty times, but she always turned the conversation, or snubbed him, or was interrupted ; she even pretended to

be afraid of him, and he could not force her to listen, because she was really his guest and he felt bound to respect her wishes. He spent a great deal of time talking with M. de la Bourdonier, but the planter found him rather dull and uninteresting; he only exerted his conversational powers when he got back to the daughter.

"But you don't really dislike me, do you, mademoiselle?" he asked one day.

"Oh," said Mademoiselle airily, "the English are our enemies."

"But you rescued me once."

"I was very young and foolish then," said Mademoiselle; "I certainly should not do it now."

"Then you do dislike me!"

"Of course," she said, "I can never like an Englishman until the English surrender to the French."

A brilliant idea occurred to Tom. "I surrendered to you in Martinique," he reminded her.

"Alas!" sighed Mademoiselle, "we have now changed places."

"But I surrender again; I surrender to your bright eyes."

"Is that my father calling?" cried Mademoiselle, springing up hastily. Will you believe it, she was blushing all over her face; and when she ran away, Tom wondered how she could have heard a call when he had heard nothing.

However, I think that Mademoiselle must have relented in the end, for there is a tradition among Tom's descendants that the captain married a

French lady, retired from the navy, and settled at Danford Hall after the death of his elder brother. I have seen a portrait said to be hers ; it represents a beautiful lady with very black eyes that seem always laughing at you and the most bewitching mouth and chin that you can imagine ; the dress is in the fashion of 1820 or thereabouts. One day, when a maid was dusting the frame, she turned the picture slightly, and I saw some words scrawled on the back. Looking closer, I read :—

Roglaire ste-naire

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